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GUIDE
TO

SNOWMOBILING

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IS LITTLE ARTHUR'S $40 PIZZA REALLY WORTH THE PRICE?
PAGE 26

INSIDE MAYOR MIKE JOHNSTON'S RESPONSE TO DENVER'S IMMIGRATION CRISIS
BY KELLEY MANLEY

THE VERY BEST LAWYERS IN THE MILE HIGH CITY & BEYOND
PAGE 52

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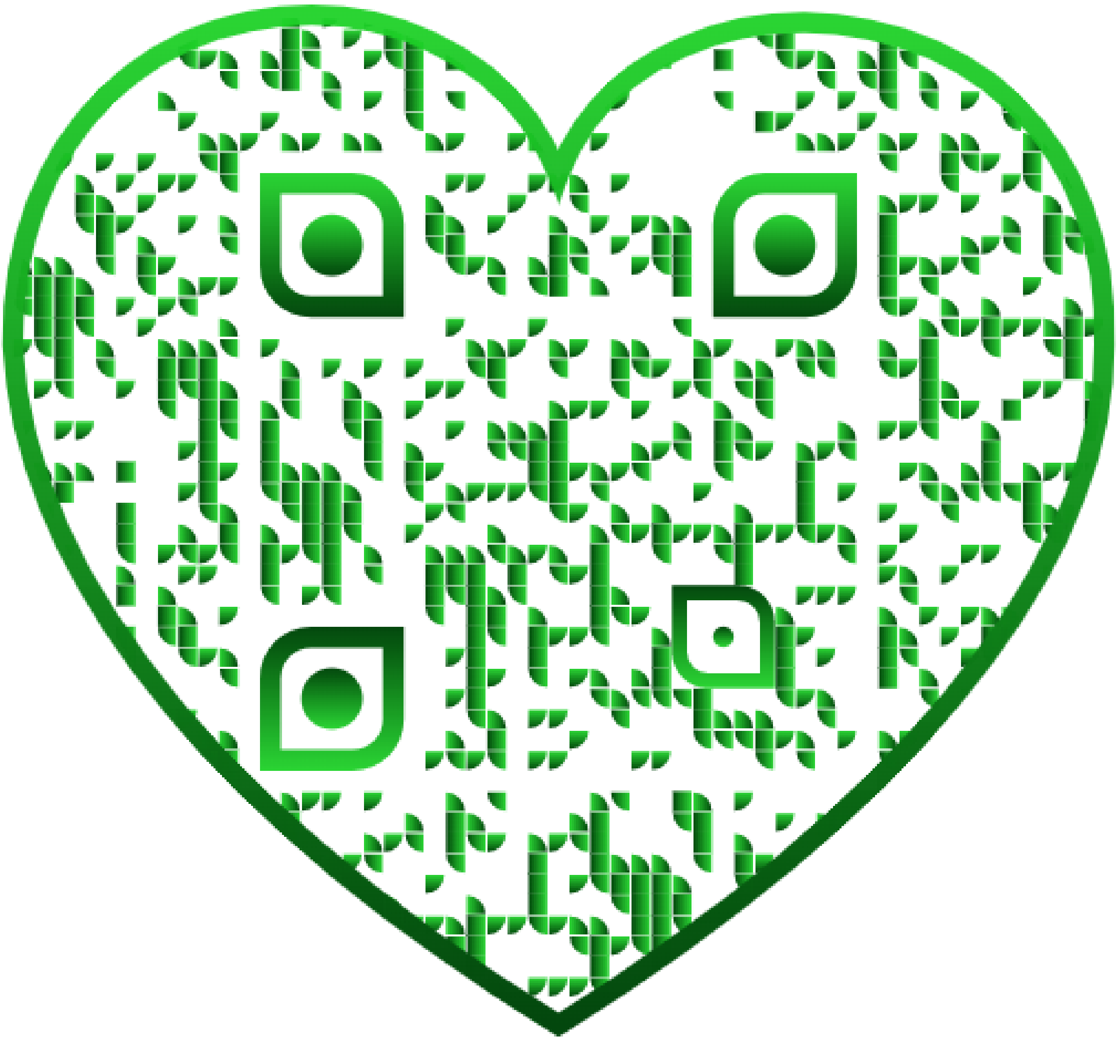

I represent victims of wrongdoing in civil actions for money damages.

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- *5280 Magazine*, Top Lawyer, plaintiffs' personal injury, x10.
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- Member, American Board of Trial Advocates (2013-Present).
- *Colorado Law Week*: "People's Choice – Best Personal Injury Lawyer" (2018, 2020) "Barrister's Best – Best Personal Injury Lawyer" (2017, 2021).
- *U.S. News & World Report, Best Lawyers:* Personal Injury Litigation, Professional Malpractice Law, Legal Malpractice Law, Medical Malpractice Law (2025).
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JANUARY 2025

Contents

36

Gone Sleddin'

This winter, explore Colorado's backcountry with a little machine-powered help. Here, our guide to some of the best spots to snowmobile in the state.

BY DALIAH SINGER

46

Seeking Sanctuary

Mayor Mike Johnston maintains that Denver's response to recent waves of unexpected migrants made his city a model on immigration. But his critics argue there was nothing novel about the help provided to asylum-seekers, which could be summed up in two words: not enough.

BY KELLEY MANLEY

52

Denver's Top Lawyers

More than 500 of the best attorneys—practicing everything from environmental to construction to contract law—in the Mile High City and beyond.

A snowmobile tour at T-Lazy-7 Ranch in Aspen

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Contents

25

20

15

18

FROM THE PUBLISHER

12 Meet *5280*'s new CEO and publisher, Charity Huff.

COMPASS

15 ADVENTURE
For 30 years, Ouray Ice Park has beckoned climbers from around the world, but rising temperatures and limited resources threaten its future.

18 INTERSECTIONS
Five steamy date-night destinations in Colorado Springs, inspired by its surprising number of resident romance novelists.

20 CULTURE
Jake Brasch's personal experiences with addiction, recovery, and familial support take center stage in his newest play.

22 TRAVEL
Inside the luxe accommodations at the San Luis Valley's new Kosmos Stargazing Resort.

EAT & DRINK

25 WHAT'S HOT
Paborito's takeaway-only ghost kitchen in Lincoln Park serves Filipino favorites, from succulent grilled meats to flavor-packed sides.

26 REVIEW
Little Arthur's promises big East Coast flavors, but are they worth the big price tags? Plus: three more delicious culinary concepts operating out of bars and breweries.

78 DINING GUIDE

COLUMN

30 REAL ESTATE
Over the past half-dozen years, Crested Butte has evolved from a relatively isolated mountain town to a magnet for the monied. Is that a good thing?
BY JULIE DUGDALE

ACT LIKE A LOCAL

96 THE OVERSIMPLIFIED GUIDE TO: RTD ETIQUETTE
A manners expert shares the do's and don'ts of riding public transportation.

ON THE COVER

Photograph by Noah Wetzel
California Park, northwest of Steamboat Springs

Clockwise from top left: Sarah Banks; Thomas Brunot/Courtesy of Jake Brasch; Courtesy of SunWater Spa; Michael Clark Photography

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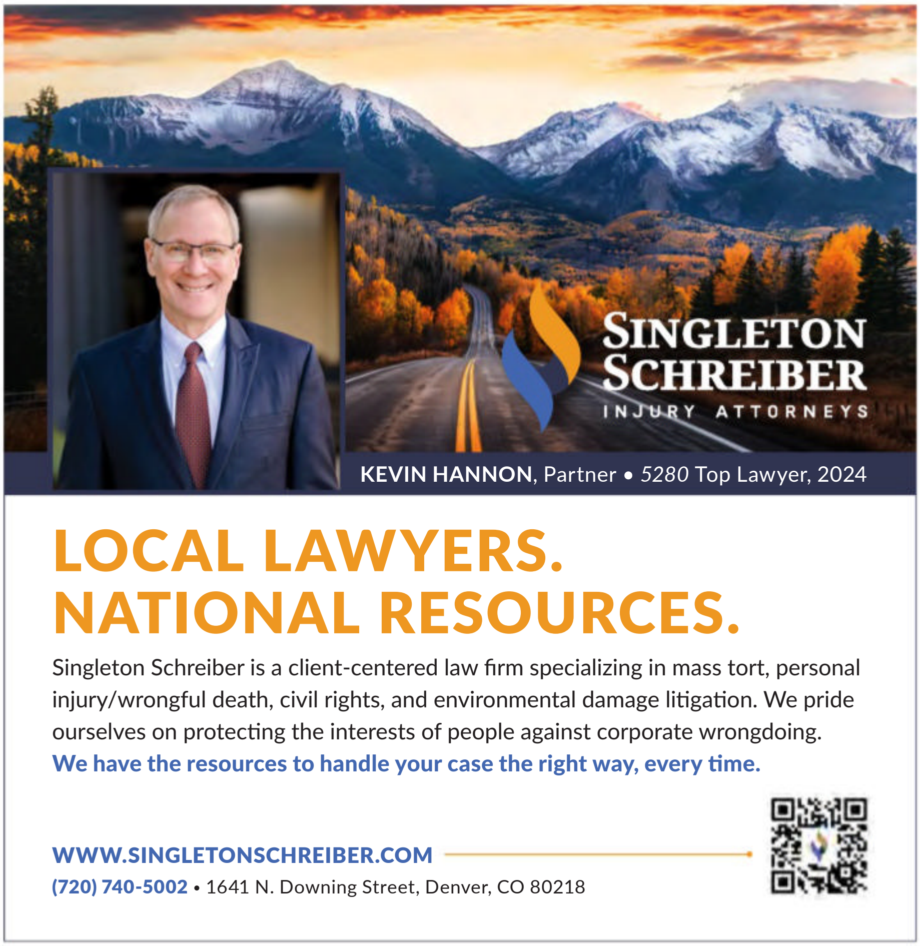

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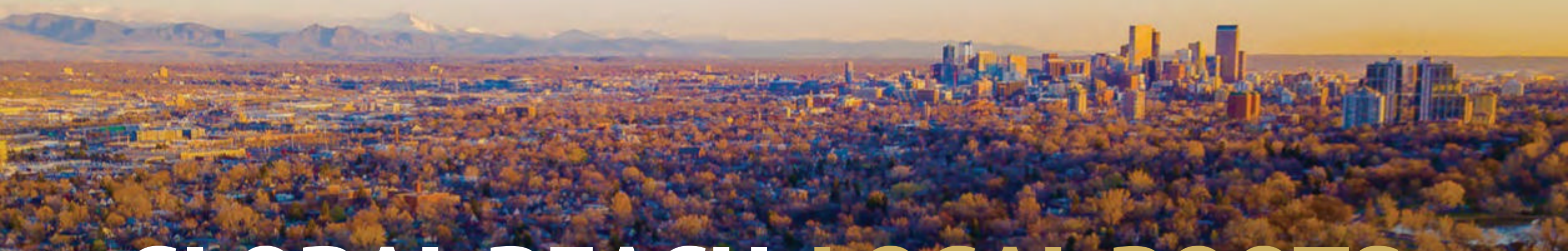

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Courtesy of Charity Huff

New Beginnings

My Denver love story probably isn't that different from many of yours. My husband and I moved here in our twenties, out of school and ready to start a new life in a new place. When we landed, *5280* was everywhere. It was our guide to this beautiful city, introducing us to the Cruise Room's La La martini, burgers at the Cherry Cricket, and concerts at the Fillmore. We selected our doctors and dentists from its lists of the best in the metro area. The magazine even led us to discover one of our favorite mountain towns (Crested Butte, whose evolution you can read about in "The Last Great Ski Town" on page 30).

Here I am, 28 years later, borrowing this space in my first issue as only the second owner and publisher in *5280*'s 32-year history—and it's still teaching me about the state I've grown to care so deeply about. "Beneath The Stars" (page 22) has me daydreaming of a trip to the San Luis Valley's new stargazing resort. I marked my calendar to get tickets to Denver playwright Jake Brasch's latest production ("Stranger Than Fiction," page 20). After reading this month's restaurant review—"Cost-Benefit Analysis," page 26—I'm determined to try Little Arthur's viral $40 pizza for myself.

5280 is so much more than what you see in the magazine, though. Annual events such as Top of the Town, 5280 Dines, and the 5280 Brunch Event (March 29, save the date!) give our readers the chance to directly interact with the places and people you meet in these pages. Our award-winning website is the go-to source for what to do around town, and tens of thousands of people invite us into their email inboxes each morning, starting their days with the event, sports, news, and culture coverage that fills our newsletter, the Local.

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As a Denverite, I'm so proud of our journalists and how they cover the community with compassion and curiosity. *5280*'s commitment to editorial independence is what sets it apart in today's crowded media landscape, and I look forward to continuing to support the work that earns our readers' trust.

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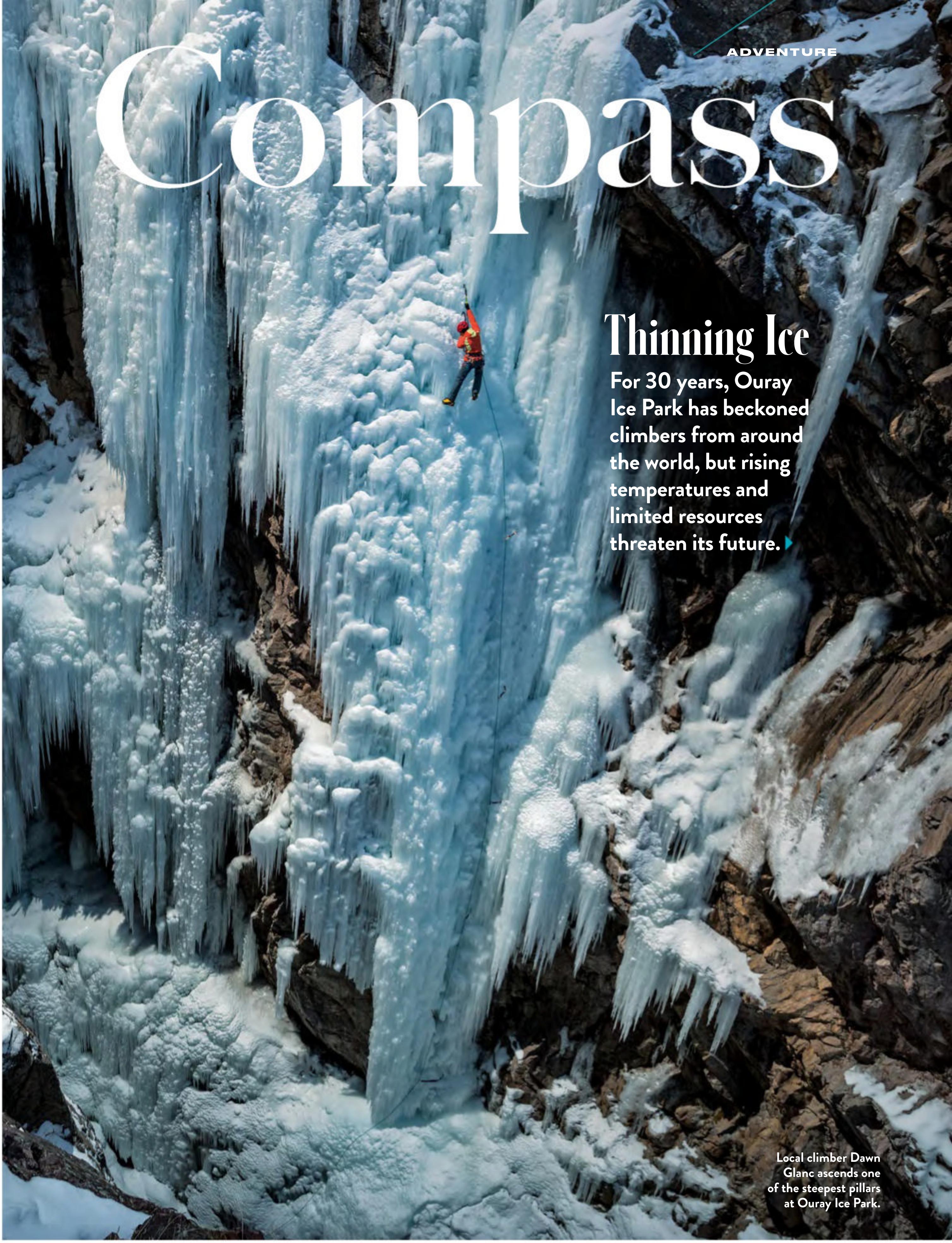
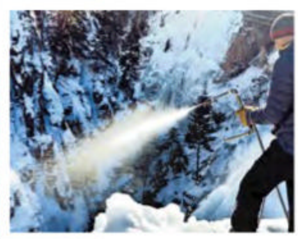


Thinning Ice

For 30 years, Ouray Ice Park has beckoned climbers from around the world, but rising temperatures and limited resources threaten its future.

Local climber Dawn Glanc ascends one of the steepest pillars at Ouray Ice Park.

Michael Clark Photography



Ice farmers often work in dangerous, bitterly cold conditions to keep Ouray Ice Park frozen.

Clockwise from left: Courtesy of Joseph Sanchez; Courtesy of Dan Chehayl; Courtesy of Pete Davis

Every winter for the past six years, Tim Foulkes has followed a consistent morning routine. After the Ouray resident's alarm goes off at 5:30 a.m., he layers on long underwear, a soft-shell jacket and pants, a Gore-Tex coat, and waterproof mountaineering boots; grabs his helmet and a backpack stocked with ice tools, a gas torch, a pipe wrench, and crampons; and heads to what he calls "nature's most beautiful art."

As an ice farmer at Ouray Ice Park—a free, public climbing arena nestled in the Uncompahgre Gorge—Foulkes helps create and maintain the park's two miles of frozen vertical terrain and more than 200 climbing routes. Starting each November, he and three other ice engineers transform the gorge walls into intricate arctic avenues by carefully streaming up to 600,000 gallons of water a day down its craggy cliffs. They repair burst or frozen pipes, tinker with water pressure levels, and traverse icy precipices to test stability and safety—often in the dark and in sub-20-degree temperatures. "We like to call ourselves alpine plumbers," Foulkes says. "It's one of the weirdest, coolest jobs on the planet."

The largest human-made public ice climbing venue in the world, Ouray Ice Park comes from humble—and unsanctioned—beginnings. In the late 1980s, local climbers and mountaineers noticed a massive wall of ice forming beneath a leaky cliffside pipeline that runs along the top of the Uncompahgre Gorge and carries water to a hydroelectric power plant. "They were going cowboy for a while, going rogue," Foulkes says, "and just climbing on that sheet of ice." Bill Whitt and Gary Wild—avid ice climbers and owners of the now-defunct Ouray Victorian Inn, the only hotel in town at the time—saw the frozen playground as a way to boost winter foot traffic and, in turn, the local economy.

It worked. After Whitt and Wild opened Ouray Ice Park in 1994, adventure seekers from around the world began flocking to the area each winter. Today, the park attracts an average of 20,000 climbers during its season (typically late December to March), and a recent economic impact study from Kent State University found that the park generated nearly $18 million for local businesses in 2021–'22. "Locals talk about being able to sled down Main Street back in the day without worrying about cars," says Peter O'Neil, executive director of the park. "Now, it's a bustling, vibrant place in the winter." And never is the town more alive than during the Ouray Ice Festival—an annual three-day ice climbing spectacle that celebrates its 30th anniversary this month—when more than 5,000 climbers descend on the area to ascend the park's frosty cliffs.

But climate change, high maintenance costs, and a limited water supply threaten the future of the venue. "Temperature is our greatest issue right now," Foulkes says, noting that ice farmers need night temperatures to consistently drop into the teens to create rock-solid terrain. The longer it takes for that to happen each winter, the shorter the park's climbing season. "The ice park used to open before Thanksgiving," Foulkes says. "Now we're lucky to open before Christmas."

Although it can't control the weather, park leadership is working to combat stunted seasons by developing its own water supply. (Currently, the facility's sole source is the city of Ouray's excess—what's left over after the town's residents and businesses get their fill.) In 2022, the park, a nonprofit, launched the Our Water, Our Future campaign to raise the $1.4 million needed to create a system that would provide the venue with three to five times the amount of water it receives from the city. The initiative has raised $1.1 million so far. When the weather cooperates, more water would allow Foulkes and his fellow farmers to grow thicker, more heat-resistant walls earlier in the season—not to mention create 40 additional routes. "We want to make sure the ice park is around for the next generation of climbers," O'Neil says. –**MICHELLE SHORTALL**

ICE BOUND This month, Ouray Ice Park hosts its **30th ice festival**—a celebration of all things ice climbing and the park's largest annual fundraising event. (O'Neil expects the 2025 edition to raise $160,000, which will help cover annual operating costs.) During the three-day event, visitors can soak at a hot springs kick-off party at Twin Peaks Lodge, check out the latest outdoor gear at Vendor Village, learn new skills during pro-led clinics, and watch some of the world's best climbers compete. *January 23 to 26; $90 for an all-access pass*

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Steamy Springs

Despite its conservative reputation, Colorado Springs is home to a surprising number of spicy romance novelists, from Lisa Renee Jones (the bestselling author of the Inside Out trilogy) to Rebecca Yarros (whose dragon-fueled Empyrean series continues this month with *Onyx Storm*). Why? It's full of inspiration points. These five date-night destinations in the Colorado Springs area will make you feel like the main character in your own titillating tale. –JESSICA GILES

***From top*: Cuddle up during a relaxing soak at SunWater Spa; tap into your wild side at Cheyenne Mountain Zoo.**

1 SunWater Spa

514 EL PASO BLVD., MANITOU SPRINGS

If you and your partner keep squabbling about socks left on the floor, it might be time for a relationship reset. Take a tranquil timeout together by booking a 90-minute soak in a private cedar tub (starting at $28 per person) filled with mineral water sourced from nearby 7 Minute Spring. The bath teems with beneficial minerals, including iron, magnesium, and calcium, and with temps hovering between 99 and 104 degrees, the waters are sure to revive any dormant passion.

2 The Rabbit Hole

101 N. TEJON ST.

Inside this underground *Alice in Wonderland*–inspired restaurant and bar, people are known to be mad—madly in love, that is. Descend stairs lined with twinkling lights into a gothic haunt whose walls are adorned with Hatters and hares painted by local artists Phil Lear and Douglas Rouse. Share a plate of crispy risotto cakes or shredded bison lettuce wraps. Just don't depart without indulging in the ultimate nightcap: the White Rabbit, a decadent concoction of vanilla vodka and coconut rum topped with a flaming marshmallow that symbolizes what might soon ignite between you and your dining companion.

3 Cave of the Winds Haunted Lantern Tour

100 CAVE OF THE WINDS ROAD,
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Cling to your cutie as you wind through nearly a mile of tight tunnels, dark passageways, and reverberant chambers. During the Haunted Lantern Tour (offered daily; $34 for adults and $24 for children eight and up), you'll explore the underground world by candlelight for 90 minutes as a guide details the cave's history and folklore. Spooky sweethearts should book the two-hour-long My Bloody Valentine tour (offered on weekends only; $45 for ages 13 and up), which kicks off in February and revels in tales of love gone wrong.

4 The Mona Lisa Fondue Restaurant

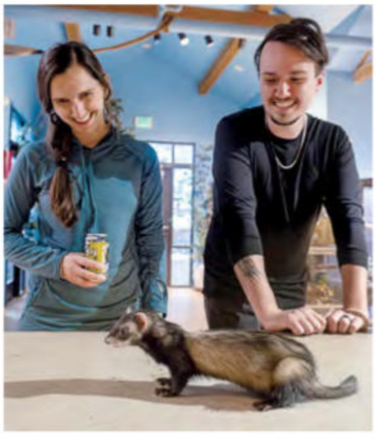
733 MANITOU AVE., MANITOU SPRINGS

Is there anything sexier than feeding your date by the forkful in a rustic atmosphere? This 30-year-old establishment's signature four-course dinner includes a salad; your choice of bubbling cheese with dunkable fresh fruit, veggie, and bread pairings; a platter of proteins, including teriyaki filet and Gulf tiger shrimp, grilled right at your table; and chocolate fondue for dessert. Longtime lovebirds receive an extra perk on their anniversaries: a percentage discount equivalent to the number of years they've been together (capped at 30 percent).

5 Starlight Safari at Cheyenne Mountain Zoo

4250 CHEYENNE MOUNTAIN ZOO ROAD

Spark an animalistic attraction during this adults-only, after-hours tour of Cheyenne Mountain Zoo (starting at $36 for members, $41 for nonmembers), during which "you get to see totally different animal behavior," says Austin Kennedy, extended education supervisor at the zoo. (Not *that* kind of behavior, you creep.) Hear the hippos honk; feed the giraffes a late-night snack; and interact with animals like chinchillas, three-banded armadillos, and black-footed ferrets—all with an adult beverage in hand.



From top: Courtesy of SunWater Spa; Courtesy of Cheyenne Mountain Zoo

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Thomas Brunot/Courtesy of Jake Brasch

Stranger Than Fiction

Jake Brasch's personal experiences with addiction and recovery take center stage in the Denver playwright's latest production.

On the first page of his script for *The Reservoir*, playwright Jake Brasch penned a straightforward note for the actors: "Play against the pain. In spite of everything, let this be a celebration of life." Those words set the tone for the comedy-drama, which centers on Josh, a Jewish, queer twentysomething who moves back to Denver from New York to recover from alcohol addiction—a story that isn't far off from its author's reality.

Growing up in Denver, Brasch developed an early love of the performing arts. "There's a video of me as a small child on a rocking horse singing the score to *Oklahoma!*," he says. "I was fully channeling some theater queen." He made his first appearance onstage in the Denver Center for the Performing Arts' (DCPA) annual production of *A Christmas Carol* at just 11 years old and discovered his knack for storytelling while participating in the center's beginning playwriting program in high school. But while studying drama at New York University, Brasch grappled with alcohol addiction and decided to move back to Denver in 2014, after earning his degree. "I had to rebuild my life from the bottom up," he says.

Sober for more than a decade, Brasch has authored several plays, including *Our Tempest*, a dark comedy about climate change, and *Salutations, I'm Creative Dave*, a science fiction show presented from the perspective of a robot. But he has never reflected so directly on his recovery as he does in *The Reservoir*, which took him three years to write and is named after the opening scene, in which Josh wakes up on the shores of Cherry Creek Reservoir after a bender. "It feels, to some extent, gross and scary to write about that time, and it would be easier to just move on," Brasch says. "But folks really see themselves in [this story], and that's been healing."

Despite the show's heavy subject matter, Brasch wants the audience to laugh. Comedic relief and heartwarming moments come in the form of Josh's grandparents, who accompany him to museums and Jazzercise classes during his recovery—scenes inspired by Brasch's own relationship with his grandma and grandpa. "I didn't want this show to be a bummer," he says. "It's going to be sweet and loving and hilarious, and you'll leave wanting to hug your grandparents."

Although Brasch has written seven full-length plays during his eight-year career (three of which have made it to the stage), *The Reservoir* is his first script to receive national acclaim. During a reading at the 2023 Colorado New Play Summit, the show caught the eye of the dramaturg for Los Angeles' Geffen Playhouse; early last year, it was recognized as a finalist in a playwriting competition at Atlanta's prestigious Alliance Theatre. *The Reservoir* will have limited full-production runs at both of those venues later this year, but first, it premieres at the DCPA (January 17 to March 9). "This is a deeply Colorado play by a deeply Colorado playwright, and I am so moved that it's debuting at the theater I revered as a kid," Brasch says. "It feels like a love letter to my grandparents, to recovery, and to Colorado."—**BARBARA O'NEIL**

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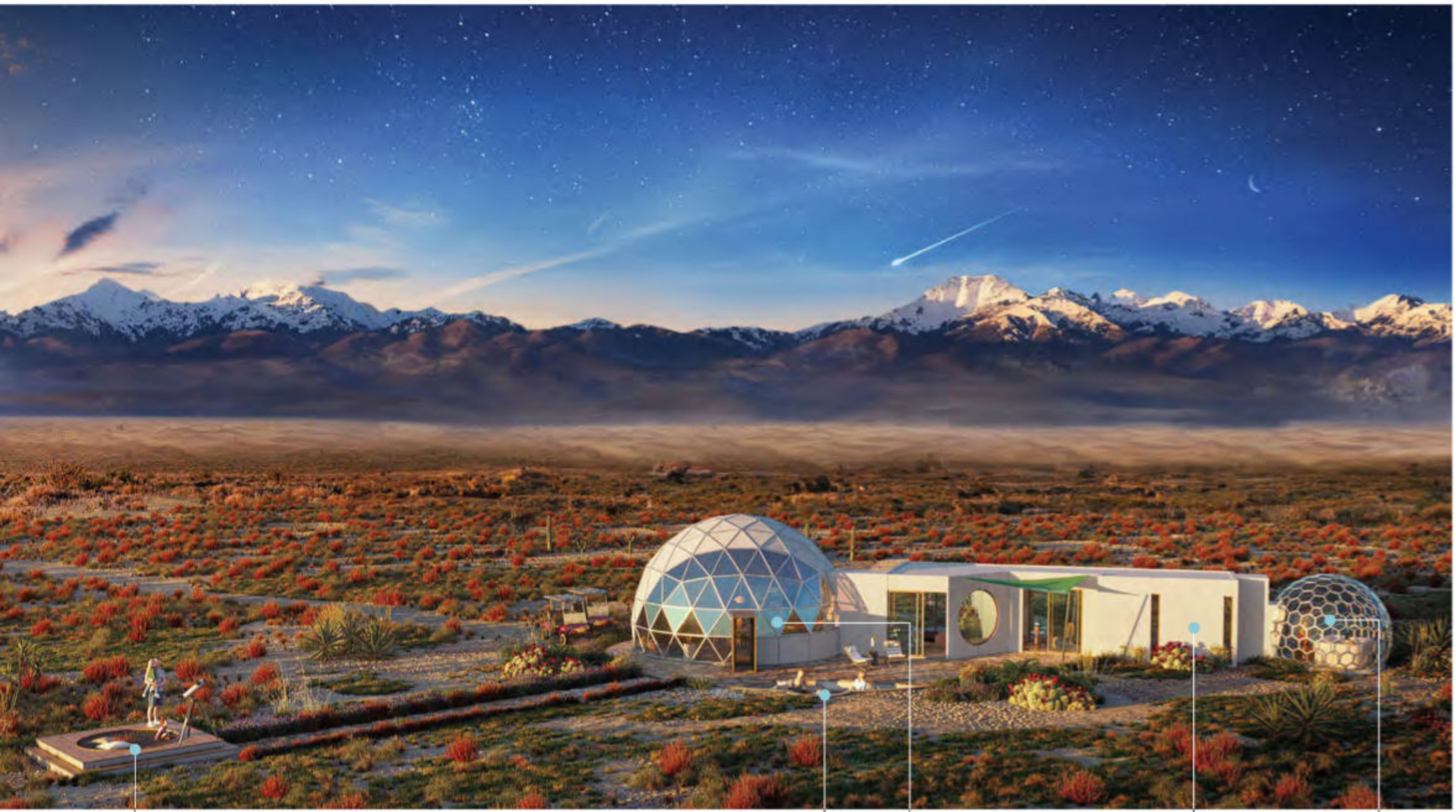
Beneath The Stars

Great Sand Dunes National Park's otherworldly terrain lures nature lovers from around the globe. But if you're as passionate about high-quality bed linens as you are about outdoor exploration, your lodging options near Alamosa were severely limited—until now. Next month, **Kosmos Stargazing Resort** will open its first luxury villa ($700 per night) just 15 minutes from the certified International Dark Sky Park, a designation given to natural areas with minimal light pollution. That distinction inspired Kosmos to offer design features and amenities targeted toward astrophiles, in addition to all the perks you'd find at a high-class hotel. The project is the brainchild of Gamal Jadue Zalaquett, a Chilean-born software developer who was living in New Jersey when he decided to visit the San Luis Valley in 2020. "I remember driving down a dirt road, seeing a coyote or a fox, and just feeling so free and connected to nature," he says. "I was like, 'Hold on, this area has a certified dark-sky national park with 600,000 annual visitors and there are only two hotels nearby, and neither caters to stargazing?' " Zalaquett plans to add 20 more villas to the 40-acre plot of remote land in the coming years. "By 2027, we're looking to have a full observatory and an educational facility where we'll host planetarium events for the community," he says. "We're going to be the Disneyland of astronomy." Tour the out-of-this-world accommodations below. **–MS**



GET A CLOSE LOOK at the stars on the telescope-equipped observatory deck.

WIND DOWN on the sunken patio, where a fire pit and unobstructed views of the sky await.

INVITE FRIENDS to stay in the upstairs loft, which accommodates two additional guests.

DRIFT OFF on a plush king-size bed inside the sleeping quarters.

SOAK & STARGAZE in a private hot tub inside a custom-built glass dome.

EAT, HANG & FLOW inside the main geodesic dome, home to a kitchen, lounge, and meditation space.

Renderings courtesy of Kosmos Stargazing Resort (2)

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Eat & Drink

Filipino Favorites

Before they opened Paborito seven months ago, Jayson Leaño and Geraldine Gan weren't confident their ghost kitchen would succeed in Denver. "We were very anxious at first," Leaño says, after watching a series of Filipino eateries on the Front Range close over the past few years—most recently, Aurora's Manila Bay, which shuttered in early 2024. However, when Leaño and Gan's now-closed Asian sandwich concept, called Toast Box, failed to gain traction, the husband-and-wife duo, both natives of the Philippines, decided to try again, this time with the cuisine they grew up on. Since its debut, Paborito, which means "favorite" in Filipino, has swiftly won Denverites' favor with a menu of barbecued meats and flavor-packed sides. Visit the carryout-only spot, inside Lincoln Park's Vallejo Food Pick-Up restaurant co-op, to take home our favorite dish: the grilled chicken inasal (*pictured*), a soy-and-citrus-marinated leg quarter that's served with turmeric- and annatto-tinged java rice, atchara (pickled unripe papaya), pancit (stir-fried vermicelli noodles), and lumpia (Filipino spring rolls).
—ETHAN PAN

PHOTOGRAPH BY SARAH BANKS & STYLING BY CHARLI ORNETT

Cost-Benefit Analysis

Little Arthur's promises big East Coast flavors, but are they worth the big price tags? —ALLYSON REEDY

^ ***From left*: Little Arthur's owner AJ Shreffler; the $40 margherita pizza**

There were a lot of questions flying around this past summer when AJ Shreffler, the chef and owner of Little Arthur's in Capitol Hill, announced on Instagram that his pizza would be "the most expensive in town." Reddit posters asked, "How and in what universe is someone getting away with charging $40/pizza?" and "Has anyone looked into the cost of dough, sauce, and cheese? What a joke" and simply "WTF?"

I had a question, too: *Well, is it worth it?*

A Pennsylvania native, Shreffler started with hoagies in 2019. In his home kitchen, he made the kind of sandwiches he missed eating back East and sold them via pop-ups. Those sandwiches, too, were criticized for their prices, which currently range from $22 for an Italian to $24 for a cheesesteak. This August, he added pizza to his menu, including the $40 pie, when he opened Little Arthur's inside Out of the Barrel Taproom.

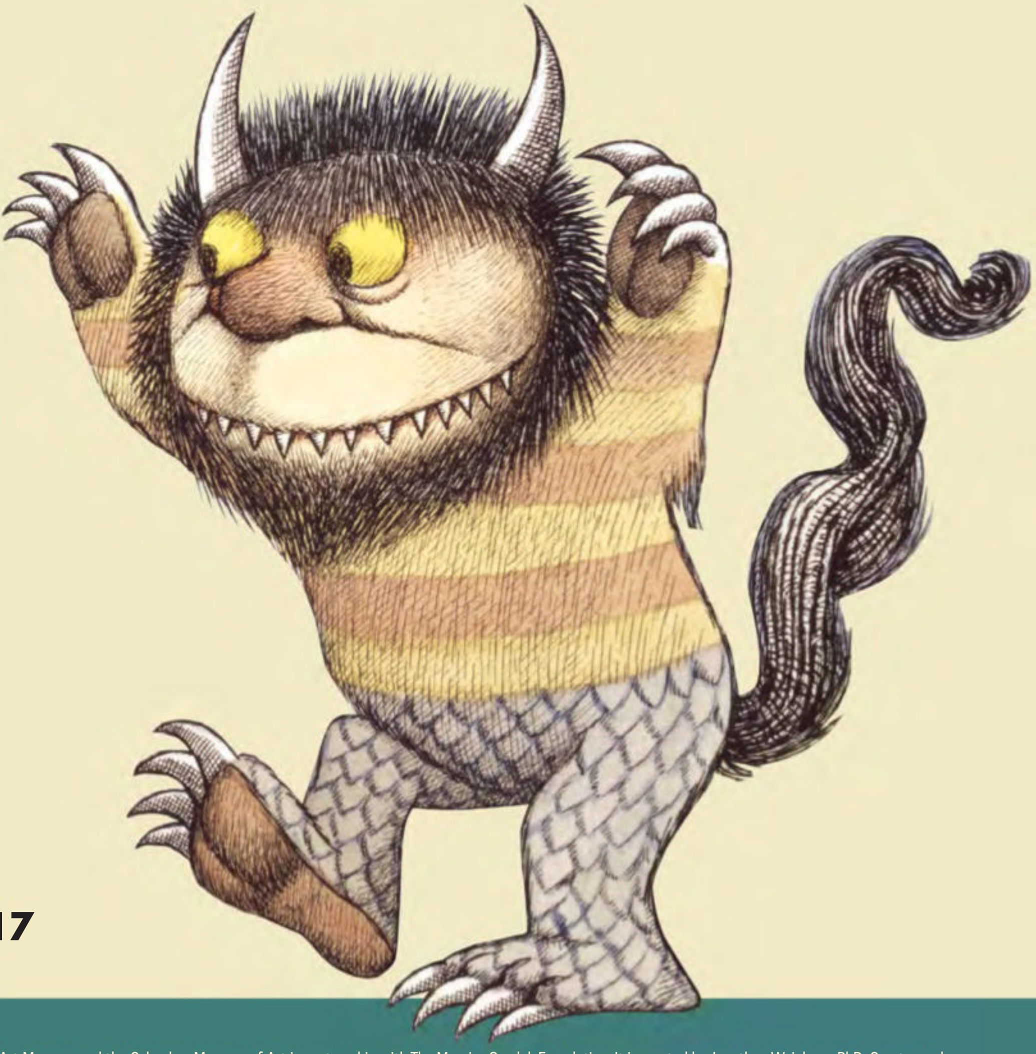
While some Denverites may be unwilling to pony up that kind of cash for East Coast–style subs and pies on principle, I was curious. On my first visit, I ordered a plain cheese pizza and the cheesesteak I'd been salivating over via Little Arthur's mouthwatering Instagram account. But after I snagged one of the six tables situated along the glass garage doors, a staffer came over to explain that the beef wasn't up to snuff, so Shreffler wasn't serving the cheesesteak. He was apologetic and, as we'd already paid for the sandwich, offered us anything on the menu to make it right.

We asked for another cheese pizza, a decision that seemed wise when the pies arrived. With a patchwork of deep red dollops of tangy San Marzano tomato sauce, dark brown bubbles of blistered crust, and yellow and white mozzarella and pecorino cheeses, the pies looked just as delicious in person as they had on my screen. They

PHOTOGRAPHY BY SARAH BANKS

WILD THINGS
— THE ART OF —
MAURICE SENDAK

CLOSING SOON



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Wild Things: The Art of Maurice Sendak has been co-organized by the Denver Art Museum and the Columbus Museum of Art in partnership with The Maurice Sendak Foundation. It is curated by Jonathan Weinberg, PhD, Curator and Director of Research at The Maurice Sendak Foundation, and Christoph Heinrich, Frederick and Jan Mayer Director of the Denver Art Museum. This exhibition is presented by the Clarence V. Laguardia Foundation with additional support provided by the Tom Taplin Jr. and Ted Taplin Endowment, Bank of America, Jana and Fred Bartlit, Bernstein Private Wealth Management, Kathie and Keith Finger, Lisë Gander and Andy Main, the Kristin and Charles Lohmiller Exhibitions Fund, Sally Cooper Murray, John Brooks Incorporated, Kent Thiry & Denise O'Leary, an anonymous donor, the donors to the Annual Fund Leadership Campaign, and the residents who support the Scientific and Cultural Facilities District (SCFD). Promotional support is provided by *5280 Magazine* and CBS Colorado.

Maurice Sendak, *Where the Wild Things Are* (detail), 1963, watercolor and ink on paper, 9 ¾ x 22 in. ©The Maurice Sendak Foundation

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^ **Little Arthur's turkey Italian hoagie**

tasted just as good, too. The crackly, crispy crust had bite from its 72-hour sourdough process, but it was still foldable, a trait tested and approved by my New Yorker husband. And, at least in this instance, cost wasn't a detractor: Divided into eight triangles, one 20-incher easily fed my family of four for less than $4 a slice.

Unfortunately, unsatisfactory meat affected my second visit as well. With the cheesesteak still out of reach, I ordered the Italian. The hoagie deploys a heavily sesame-seeded house-baked roll inspired by Philadelphia's legendary Sarcone's Bakery, and it holds thin-shaved ham, salami, and capocollo from Denver's River Bear American Meats. Seasoned with oregano, olive oil, and red wine vinegar, the sandwich was far better than you'd find at your average sub shop, but the roll isn't large enough to feed two. I'll admit that I'm not a huge lover of sandwiches, but spending more than $20 for a single serving of bread and deli meat seems excessive to me.

I am, however, a huge fan of cupping pepperoni, which we added to our pizza the second time around. While some of the salamis were wet and dripping with grease, others were dry and far too charred. This is a forgivable misstep at my cheap neighborhood pizzeria, but not when it's a $5 upcharge.

A week later, I saw my coveted, ooey-gooey $24 cheesesteak back on social media. When I arrived, I ordered that, the margherita pizza, and the robust cookie tray for dessert. My total was more than $100.

Nearly 30 minutes later, the cheesesteak arrived, looking just as rich and creamy as I'd hoped. Delivered on that same seeded bun, it's loaded up with 10 ounces of shaved rib-eye. The use of Cooper sharp—a melty cheese that's long been popular at delis in the Northeast—makes this iteration unlike any cheesesteak I've had in Denver. As much as I'd anticipated digging into this Philly-born icon, though, I'm not sure I'd order it again. It ventured into too-salty territory, which was a bummer because I could otherwise understand the hype.

The enthusiasm around the $40 pizza was similarly lost on me. What makes the margherita pie so special (and so expensive), according to Shreffler, is the fior di latte mozzarella, a cow's milk cheese sourced from a sixth-generation dairy farm in Naples, Italy. I'm sure this hard-to-come-by cheese is delicious, but I wouldn't know because some of our slices only had two small circles of it, and they were overpowered by the tomato sauce.

These shortcomings bring me back to my original question about Little Arthur's: *Is it worth it?* There's no question that Shreffler is using top-tier ingredients and putting time and effort into creating a short menu of different-for-Denver pizzas and hoagies. And Shreffler's place certainly isn't the only new pricey pizza joint in town (see: Roberta's Pizza in Uptown). I'll go back for that cheese pizza, but I didn't find much else at Little Arthur's that warrants a bill roughly equivalent to what I pay for a week's worth of groceries.

LITTLE ARTHUR'S

Out of the Barrel Taproom,
205 E. Seventh Ave.
littlearthurs.com

The Draw:
East Coast–style pizzas and hoagies; friendly service

The Drawback:
Too-salty cheesesteak; the $40 margherita pie lacked enough cheese

Noise Level:
Loud

Don't Miss:
The plain cheese pie

SOAK IT UP

Little Arthur's is just one of several culinary concepts around town that reside inside breweries and bars. Here, a few of our favorite spots for booze and bites. –AR

CUL-DE-SAC

→ Inside Dewey Beer Taproom

Ultreia and Split Lip vet Adam Branz and his team had been hanging out at RiNo's Dewey Beer so often that the owner got them their own food trailer. The result is two-month-old Cul-de-Sac, where funky plates like escargot wontons and duck confit quesadillas live up to the tagline of "sleazy French food stuffs."

MUSIC CITY HOT CHICKEN

→ Inside TRVE Brewing

A little bit country, a little bit rock 'n' roll: When the owners of this Fort Collins–based, Nashville-style chicken spot decided to expand to Denver in 2021, they chose heavy-metal-themed TRVE Brewing in Baker. Choose your level of burn—from classic up to flammable solid—on a crispy chicken sandwich or tenders.

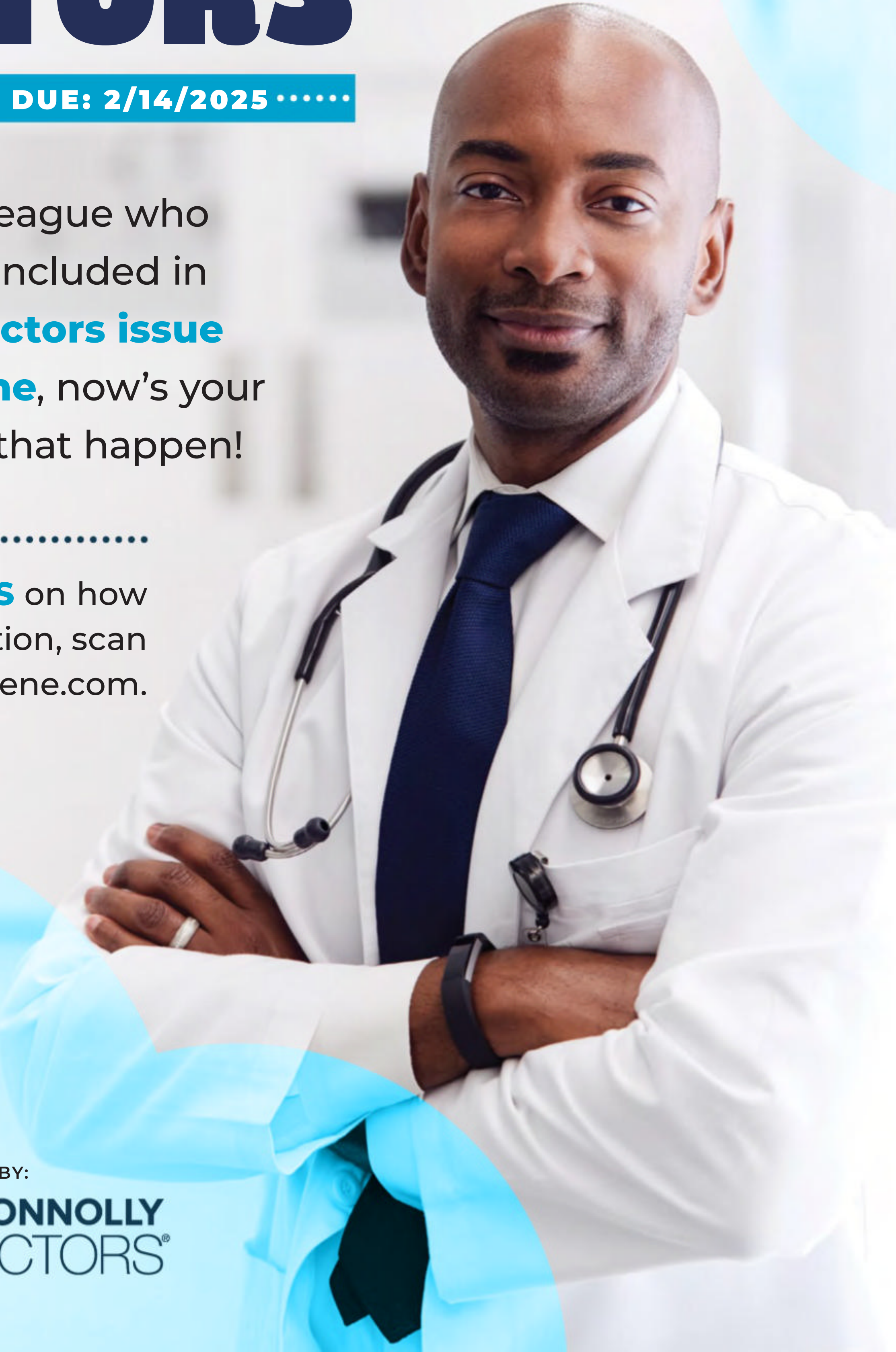
SAMOSA SHOP

→ Inside Honor Farm

It takes something special to match the energy of LoDo's "haunted spirit house" Honor Farm. Enter: Samosa Shop, an Indian American street food vendor that serves lamb kebab smashburgers, vindaloo chicken birria tacos, and its secret samosa of the week (but only to the living).

Samosa Shop

Jeff Fierburg/Courtesy of Samosa Shop (Samosa Shop)



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The Last Great Ski Town

Over the past half-dozen years, Crested Butte has evolved from a relatively isolated mountain town to a magnet for the monied. Is that a good thing?

BY JULIE DUGDALE

On a crisp early October morning in downtown Crested Butte, the aspens are doing their thing, radiating gold and fluttering audibly in the breeze. Sunshine warms the shoulders of couples strolling along Elk Avenue—dogs on leashes, coffees in hand—against the backdrop of the town's eponymous peak. Planters overflowing with fall blooms gild pastel-painted Victorian buildings, and handwritten chalkboard signs beckon passersby to pop through the open doors of storefronts.

The whole vibe is impossibly quaint—perhaps more so because of the quirky free-spiritedness that makes the charm feel genuine. There's the legendary Camp 4 Coffee, a caffeine cabin shingled with discarded license plates. Antique mining relics tuck into nooks between sagging 140-year-old buildings. Lost-and-found ski gloves cap each picket on a fence, their middle fingers standing at attention. This sort of cheeky whimsy keeps the town un-persnickety. Un-Aspen, un-Vail. Locals and visitors have long reveled in CB's gritty, soulful magic, an alchemy that's elusive in so many other tourist-heavy ski towns.

That is, perhaps, why change comes hard in this former mining enclave in the shadow of the Elk Mountains. Why locals are concerned about uber-wealthy developers displacing the longtime establishments that give the town its stop-by-anytime-for-a-beer-and-a-chat atmosphere. "The dynamics are changing," says Ben McLoughlin, the owner of Chillberg, a New Zealand–style ice cream cart. Maybe a little for the better *and* for the worse, says the art teacher turned sweets purveyor, who moved to town in 1992. "But what *is* the 'better'? Is it for more people to visit? More people to get to see the town? We've always been kind of funky and weird. I feel like we're losing our character...but we are really lucky to have a community that cares about how we grow."

Despite decades of change, downtown Crested Butte has maintained its charms.

JEFF HERMANSON MOSTLY comes off as a regular Joe. The longtime Crested Butte local is a partner at Denver-based real estate and development firm Urban Villages and is widely lauded for his transformation of both Larimer Square and Union Station, not to mention the recent debut of Civic Center's nature-inspired Populus Hotel. On a Zoom call from the home he built when he first arrived in the Western Slope ski mecca five decades ago, he flips his laptop around so the camera pans a stunning mountain home interior, all wood beams and huge windows. "I'd have to hire a forensic architect to recall how many times I've remodeled or added on to it," Hermanson says. "This house is a metaphor for Crested Butte—in how it's evolved and changed. Quite frankly, it's infinitely better than it was when I built it in 1973, although in 1973 it surely fit my lifestyle."

PHOTOGRAPHY BY J.C. LEACOCK

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He's right. Crested Butte didn't transform from a late-19th-century, end-of-the-road mining settlement into a vacation destination with a median single-family home price of $2.1 million by becoming a time capsule. As Mayor Ian Billick says, "We could argue that it's been changing since the miners kicked the Utes out." Both Billick and Hermanson—and, for that matter, many other engaged locals—say it's not the change itself that warrants concern, but rather how the town navigates and responds to those changes. "There are those people who are going to sit on the curb waiting for the world to come back to the way it was," Hermanson says, "and those who are going to embrace change and try to make a difference. That's sort of where I see Crested Butte today."

The legendary Camp 4 Coffee in Crested Butte

Hermanson hasn't been shy about ushering in change over the past few years, especially when it comes to purchasing and transforming properties on Elk Avenue. A desire to remake things is nothing new for the 75-year-old, who opened his first Crested Butte restaurant in the mid-'70s. His most recent acquisitions, all within a few doors of one another, include the Breadery building, still operating as a bakery and restaurant; the Last Steep, a beloved burgers-and-fries joint that re-emerged in late 2023 as the casual Hideout Bar & Kitchen; and the Montanya Distillers Tasting Room, which reopened under new ownership down the street, leaving the original space open for the summer 2024 launch of Two Twelve. The sophisticated open-hearth eatery touts fire-cooked entrées that average $55 (veggie sides are an additional $18).

Hermanson debuted Hideout and Two Twelve in partnership with one of CB's most prolific and highly regarded restaurateurs: Kyleena Falzone of Secret Stash and Bonez fame. Two Twelve has generated a lot of buzz, and, true to form, on a recent shoulder-season evening, the eatery hummed with chatter while patrons sipped cocktails at the backlit bar. "Five years ago," a twentysomething bartender said between wine recommendations, "a place like this wouldn't have made it." But he believes CB's evolving nature works. Is it a playground for second-home owners? For sure, he said, but that doesn't mean those folks are the harbingers of death for the town's soul. In fact, he's grateful for the influx of visitors who don't blink at $400 dinner tabs. "I want my slice of this while it lasts," he said.

Across the street from Two Twelve, German-inspired Brühaus Mountain Tavern, an indoor-outdoor beer hall concept, also opened this past summer after the previous occupant, locals' favorite Brick Oven Pizzeria & Pub, shuttered at its 20-year mark in April 2022. Brühaus' benefactor? Billionaire financier Mark Walter, the CEO of Chicago-based investment firm Guggenheim Partners and part-owner of the Los Angeles Dodgers.

The Brühaus space is just one of a half-dozen Elk Avenue buildings Walter scooped up in 2021, along with the 88-acre Almont Resort down-valley and the largest undeveloped lot in town, known as Sixth Street Station. Under the previous owners, this chunk of prime real

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estate on the north end of Crested Butte, en route to the ski hill, was the biggest project ever to undergo the town's entitlement process, a tedious labyrinth of permit approvals that took years to navigate. It was set to become 62,500 square feet of mixed-use space anchored by a new high-end boutique hotel. According to the sellers' real estate agent, Chris Kopf, they were hoping Walter would see the four-blocks-long project through. But the sixtysomething businessman has let the entitlements expire and has yet to divulge what he plans to do with the languishing lot.

The fates of other Walter acquisitions, like the iconic 1881 Forest Queen hotel building—recently home to the Coal Creek Grill, it has been dark or under construction since Walter bought it in early 2021—are similarly mysterious. Stealth mode seems to be the MO for the notoriously media-averse mogul, who did not respond to multiple attempts to contact him for this story. And while Walter isn't new to town—he purchased a vacation home in Mt. Crested Butte in 2009, and he bought the historical Grubstake Building in 2011—he reintroduced himself in a big way with this sudden spate of pandemic-era purchases. The buying spree has become cause for speculation and guardedness. "Mark Walter is used to doing things a certain way," says *Crested Butte News* editor Mark Reaman, who has repeatedly and publicly implored the investor to at least hint at a plan for the future. "He's probably a great businessman.... I don't think he's out to change or destroy [Crested Butte]. His error is that he's not taking community feedback. That doesn't go over well in a small town."

It's not that folks don't welcome the infusion of capital into their little piece of high-elevation paradise. Few mom-and-pop teams could afford to purchase and remodel an original Victorian building in a way that meets the town's stringent preservation requirements *and* caters to the modern sensibilities of well-heeled tourists. An amenities-based economy needs the attention of investors like Hermanson and Walter; some just regret the loss of intimacy.

Downtown Crested Butte is not—or, at least, it hasn't been—a place that's detached from those who live there year-round. Residents fondly recall the times they could pop by a patio on Elk Avenue after a trail ride and know the guys slinging beers behind the bar. More recently, some of those places are manned by strangers—or they sit empty waiting on a developer to share his vision. "The problem with [Walter] not being an owner-operator is that he doesn't have any urgency," Mayor Billick says. "[He] has this huge portfolio, and for a guy who owns the LA Dodgers, being delayed a year or two on opening a restaurant in Crested Butte probably isn't something that keeps him up at night."

NO MATTER HOW big their bank account is, one thing everyone in Crested Butte can agree on is the ballooning crisis of affordability. After the ski resort joined the Rocky Mountain Super Pass (the predecessor to the Ikon Pass) in 2014 and then the Epic Pass (Vail Resorts bought Crested Butte in 2018), skiers previously tied to I-70 corridor mountains began filling up local Airbnbs on long weekends. Add to that a marketing blitz for Crested Butte's mountain biking allure, the paving of Cottonwood Pass in 2019, and a surge in visitation fueled by the work-remote, play-outside culture of COVID-19, and it's easy to see why there's been an uptick in Front Range tourists.

Many business owners appreciate the resulting boom in sales but, at the same time, bemoan the changing culture. "It's a double-edged

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sword," Danica Ramgoolam, owner of Townie Books and Rumors Coffee & Tea House, says. "Sales have increased by 20 percent since 2020 and have stayed at this higher level...because so many people from the Front Range are wanting to see the cute town and experience the magic of it. And we're part of that magic. But it's a bummer that the majority of the restaurants now are catering to higher-end visitors as opposed to locals. That said, we'd also like to be less expensive, but we're paying our employees twice as much as we did five years ago to account for the ludicrous housing costs."

Workforce housing—or lack thereof—has become the single biggest conundrum in Crested Butte's fragile economic ecosystem, which depends as much on the tourist dynamic as on the teachers, civil servants, plumbers, and nurses who are the scaffolding for a high quality of life in this remote locale. Multiple housing projects are in the pipeline in the valley, including Hermanson's proposal for a 500-unit workforce housing development in Gunnison, half an hour south. Still, the problem isn't going away overnight. The last time a household earning the town's median income—now $87,159 for a couple—could afford a 30-year fixed mortgage on a home was in 2012, according to Crested Butte's community development department.

"It's a tough thing to swallow when I continually see that none of my friends' children are going to be able to afford a house in Crested Butte unless they go off and make it big on Wall Street," says Glo Cunningham, outreach coordinator at the Crested Butte Museum and a tour guide who's called the town home for nearly 50 years. While she is excited that Walter and Hermanson are pouring money into historical treasures, she was less than enthused when her taxes inflated after Walter doled out $14.4 million to acquire 10 empty lots across the street from her house. It's that kind of side effect, she says, that's driving longtime residents and the younger generation out for good. "That's a sad state of affairs," she says.

The issue isn't lost on folks tasked with charting the best path forward. "We're being gentrified," says Troy Russ, community development director for the town. "Gentrification is that paradox where there's investment coming in and serving a need that's different than what the community needs. People can no longer afford taxes or groceries because the investment is serving tourism and services. So how do we balance it? We want to make sure that investment is leveraged toward us."

That's one reason why the town created a decision-making framework called the Community Compass. The plan, adopted in 2022 after a year of community collaboration, provides a broad manifesto for navigating the rapid economic growth and accompanying changes that are shaping CB's future. "The Compass is a way to become more proactive and strategic," says Mel Yemma, the long-range planner for Crested Butte. "At our core, we need to know who we are and what we value. We need a sense of direction. We're not Aspen or Telluride."

And locals would like to keep it that way. Neither of those ski destinations has year-round occupancy rates as high as Crested Butte's, which sits at two-thirds, meaning Aspen and Telluride are even more flush with second-home owners and vacation renters. "One of the things we always used to say: If we make it nice for us, we'll make it nice for tourists," says John Hess, who moved to Crested Butte in 1990 and went on to become the town planner for 23 years. And today? "We now seem to attract people with more money. What we used to attract was people more or less like us, who didn't have money."

Crested Butte had always been a town by the locals, for the locals. Until it wasn't. "I feel the funkiness is still there," says Andy Eflin, who was born in Crested Butte in 1961. His father, Dick Eflin, was one of the founders of Crested Butte Ski Resort. The younger Eflin grew up watching the old clapboards and dirt roads transform over time as lifts and trails spread across the slopes. Today, he's been priced out of town and lives in Gunnison. "Can it be hung onto?" he asks. "I sure hope so. But you can't stop the progression."

From where Hermanson sits—whether at his trendy new eatery Two Twelve or perhaps at the bar of the oldest restaurant in town, the Wooden Nickel (now a part of Walter's mini-empire)—the key to preserving Crested Butte's unique spirit is twofold. First, embrace revitalization while prioritizing solutions (see: workforce housing) to the problems it creates. "Change is inevitable; it's about trying to influence it as much as you can," Hermanson says. "Mark Walter, I think, will be a good steward. I think he'll do good things. He may not do it as quickly or visibly as some of the projects I'm doing. But I think his heart's in the right place." Second, know that growth can't alter the spirit of a place if its people don't let it. "It's human nature to resist change," Hermanson says, but he adds that underneath the grumbling, there's a commonality that unites locals, second-home owners, and visitors: a reverence for CB's distinctive way of life. And that might be what saves Crested Butte from itself. ▲▲

Julie Dugdale is a Denver-based freelance writer. Send feedback to letters@5280.com.

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Gone

Thunderstruck Adventures runs tours near Steamboat Springs.

This winter, explore Colorado's backcountry with a little machine-powered help. Here, our guide to some of the best spots to snowmobile in the state. BY DALIAH SINGER

Sleddin’

WHEN YOU WANT TO

Sled Like A Pro

BOOK A RIDE WITH:
STEAMBOAT SPRINGS' THUNDERSTRUCK ADVENTURES

I'm attempting to defy gravity. As I throttle my Polaris 850 RMK Matryx Slash snowmobile with my right thumb, I shift to stand with both feet on the left running board of the sled, a move I pray will keep the machine upright while I make a wide circle in a meadow of fluffy powder. We're well off the trail, and the heavy snowmobile needs the right distribution of weight to turn without tipping sideways and knocking me off.

Across the way, Clay Hockel, my guide, is throwing wheelies and carving through the snow with little thought for Sir Isaac Newton's discovery. The 27-year-old owner of Thunderstruck Adventures is a former professional snowmobile rider from Minnesota; he spent five years hucking cliffs and riding chutes in extreme backcountry snowmobiling films before launching his outfitting service in 2019. "I wanted to get people into the backcountry and give them the experience," he says, "not just watch it in a movie." The new-in-2023, half-day backcountry tour I signed up for is a taste of what he calls "real snowmobiling."

I'm doing my best to follow his coaching, but maneuvering the 420-pound sled while also steering and trying to maintain consistent pressure on the throttle is more challenging than I'd anticipated. Sometimes, as I shift my body to one side, I accidentally release the gas and my upper body jerks into the handlebars. I can already tell I'm going to be sore in the morning.

Soon, though, I start to find a rhythm. At least, when I turn left. Circling to the right—an endeavor that puts more of my weight near my throttle thumb and makes me feel less coordinated—continues to vex me. But I hoot loudly as I climb a hill, rotate the sled in an arc (to the left), and fly back across the meadow. I feel a sense of freedom as I speed over the terrain and hop from side to side. I'm sure it's all happening in much slower motion than it is in my mind, but for a few minutes, I feel like I've mastered the machine.

My friend and I had started our morning outing a couple of hours earlier at Thunderstruck's Steamboat Springs shop, where we outfitted ourselves in boots, teal-and-black snowsuits, and helmets before being shuttled to the trailhead about 30 minutes west of town. We had 12 miles of groomed but bumpy trail to get comfortable on the snowmobiles before turning onto the private mountain Hockel leases to joyride in pristine meadows.

IF YOU GO

What: Thunderstruck Adventures' Half-Day Intro to Pro Ride

When: Twice a day, at 9 a.m. and 1 p.m., December 20 to April 1

Duration: Three hours

Cost: $395/driver

Take Note: Riders must be 15 or older; a complimentary shuttle is available to pick riders up at their hotels.

Side Trip: Last season, Steamboat Ski Resort added 650 acres of glade skiing and steep cliffs at Mahogany Ridge and Fish Creek Canyon. Replenish lost calories back in town with year-old Brass Kitchen & Bar's old-fashioned soda fountain drinks, including a spiked root beer float.

By the time we leave the spruce- and aspen-lined pasture, the snow-covered trail feels more comfortable. Still, it's a welcome break when we reach a panoramic viewpoint overlooking Steamboat Ski Resort and Buffalo Pass. My palms and thumbs are aching.

As we work our way back to the shuttles, Hockel asks if we want to briefly explore another meadow. We eagerly say yes, feeling confident. That's when gravity finally catches up with me. As I crest the hill and move my body to make another turn, the sled tilts too far to the side and deposits me into pillowy softness up to my knees. I take a few moments to admire the clouds and then pop up to try again. —*DS*

Previous spread and this page: Courtesy of Thunderstruck Adventures

SMARTEN UP

Snowmobiling basics to keep in mind when you're on the trails or in the backcountry.

ETIQUETTE

Many groomed snowmobile trails **share space** with snowshoers and cross-country skiers. Slow down when approaching or passing, and give uphill riders right-of-way.

Ride **single file**.

Stay on the **right side** of the trail.

Only ride on trails that allow for **motorized access**.

Do not take your snowmobile on trails when there's a **lack of snow**; it can harm soil and vegetation.

Turn off your engine if you're stopping for an extended period to cut down on noise pollution and unnecessary emissions.

It can be difficult to hear other people when the sleds are running. Learn common **hand signals**, such as raising your arm, bent at the elbow with palm open, to indicate when those behind you should stop.

LINGO

Sled: colloquial name for a snowmobile

Skis: the blades at the bottom of the snowmobile that glide along the snow and steer the vehicle

Throttle thumb: pain that develops from holding down a sled's throttle for a long time; adjust where your hand sits on the handlebar and take breaks to stretch to help ease the discomfort (the more you ride, the less this should happen)

GEAR

Wear: a snowsuit, moisture-wicking layers, goggles, full-face helmet, gloves (not mittens) for dexterity, warm socks, and snow boots

Bring: a face mask or balaclava, extra clothing, water, and avalanche equipment

> **"COME READY TO LEARN AND READY TO GET A WORKOUT. SNOWMOBILING IS NOT A DAY OFF FROM SKIING OR SNOWBOARDING LIKE A LOT OF PEOPLE THINK."**
>
> **—CLAY HOCKEL**
> THUNDERSTRUCK ADVENTURES

Cavan Images/Alamy Stock Photo

WHEN YOU WANT TO

Revel In Nature

BOOK A RIDE WITH: **GRAND LAKE'S GRAND ADVENTURES**

I push the start button on my Ski-Doo Grand Touring sled and am met with silence. I go to push it again, thinking my machine isn't working, then realize: The silence is the point. "It's kind of like a sailboat compared to a motorboat," my guide, Jake Regehr with Grand Adventures, says of the electric version of a classic snowmobile I'm riding.

We're in a lot just past the tubing hill in Fraser. Grand Lake, about 30 miles down the highway, is known as the Snowmobiling Capital of Colorado, but I've come to the area seeking not deeper powder, but deeper knowledge about an environmentally friendly way to snowmobile.

Despite the undeniable fun they offer, the noisy machines have been found to disturb wildlife and release toxic emissions (see "On Impact" at left). These new electric Ski-Doos are a potential antidote to those concerns, and Grand Adventures is one of just two Colorado outfitters that offer riders the chance to try out the machines.

Our small group sets out on a ride along trails that snake across Arapaho National Forest. Once we're on the move, the sled sounds a bit like a struggling lawn mower—revving, but gently. Although Jake relies on hand motions to communicate when we need to slow down or make a sharp turn, as the first person in our caravan I am actually able to hear his voice over the motor when he speaks, an impossibility on a traditional sled.

One thing these babies do have in common with gas-powered machines: My ride is still a 500-pound motorized monster that demands my attention. As soon as I hit a patch of powder, I swerve slightly, feeling like I'm driving a car with bald tires. It takes a bit of practice to figure out how to keep the skis centered and maintain control of the handlebars. But as we zoom along, I find a groove. At the top of a hill, we pause to snap photos of Winter Park

IF YOU GO

What: Grand Adventures' Guided 1 Hour Trailblazers Tour—Electric Snowmobile

When: Three times per day on Mondays, Fridays, Saturdays, and Sundays

Duration: Two hours for the full experience, including gearing up and the one-hour tour

Cost: Starting at $175

Take Note: Helmets are included with your tour, plus the electric sleds have heated handlebars; full-body snowsuits and snow boots are available for rent.

Side Trip: Besides a hot tub, almost nothing is better after a day on the trails than tacos and beer. Terrain Taco, a taqueria and cocktail bar that shares space with Unravel Cafe & Bar at Gravity Haus in downtown Winter Park, opened in February 2024.

ON IMPACT

Snowmobiles can have substantial consequences for Mother Nature.

Whether we trample a flower or disturb a herd of deer, there are repercussions to all outdoor fun. But experts say snowmobiles can deliver outsize harms.

Research has shown that pollutants—like carbon monoxide and hydrocarbons—released in snowmobile emissions accumulate in the snow and can lead to the deaths of aquatic insects and amphibians. Other data suggests sleds' heavy weights can lead to soil erosion. Wildlife, reports say, is also affected. "Future populations of deer and elk and moose and bighorn sheep are at stake," says Hilary Eisen, policy director at Winter Wildlands Alliance, a national conservation nonprofit based in Idaho. "Pregnant females are more likely to lose their calves or not be able to nurse them into yearlings if they've been stressed throughout the winter [by noise and displacement]."

That doesn't mean you shouldn't take a joyride, though. Staying on trails, sticking to designated over-snow vehicle (OSV) routes, riding where there's adequate snow cover, and abiding by closures can mitigate many potential problems, Eisen says. Electric OSVs are better when it comes to air quality impacts and noise, though they can make it harder for wildlife to sense approaching vehicles.

So far, White River National Forest is the only Colorado region to create an official OSV use map, but the Rio Grande National Forest is starting the process. And more electric options coming online soon should help Coloradans protect wildlands and give everyone ample opportunities to enjoy them, too.

Resort, the Continental Divide, and the Never Summer Mountains.

The Grand Adventures team is still experimenting with how far the sleds can go before they need to be recharged; the cold weather affects battery life. As a precaution, these tours are limited to one hour, but we finish our journey without incident, having used just one-third of the available juice.

Also to conserve energy, each of our sleds has a device that limits how fast we can accelerate. I'll admit that the pace (capped at 25 mph for the tour) disappoints me at first. But then we begin the drive down the hill through a dense stand of aspens, and I forget all about my need for speed. The view is quintessential Colorado. And being able to travel through it without the loud roaring of a vehicle—one that can damage the beauty that surrounds me—feels like the right way to ride. —*DS*

This spread, from left: Getty Images; Talbot Images/Getty Images; Rapid Image Photography/Courtesy of Grand Adventures

PLAY & LEARN

Want to up your riding skills? Sign up for a clinic with one of these area groups.

Powder Pro Lab

Leadville

An AIARE-certified avalanche safety training program, Powder also offers a variety of backcountry snowmobiling clinics, from beginner to advanced levels. *powderprolab.com*

Mercier's Mountain Riding School

Tabernash

Committed riders with their own sleds can join small-group development clinics, avalanche training, and even an advanced Pow Day class that's held only when the right storm blows through. *merciersmountainridingschool.com*

Mountain Skillz

South Fork

Professional snowmobiler Matt Entz leads two- and three-day workshops focused on skill development and avalanche safety. Mountain Skillz also offers a ladies-only clinic. *mountainskillz.com*

WHEN YOU WANT TO

Cruise With The Family

BOOK A RIDE WITH: LEADVILLE ATV TOURS

"Mommy! It has *tracks*!" my toddler shouts with glee as we approach our ride: a UTV (utility task vehicle, aka side-by-side) that's not entirely unlike a snowmobile, in that it's a powered way to explore powder-covered trails. What makes it different—and ideal for anyone who might be physically unable or simply not inclined to mount an open-air steed capable of doing 100 mph—is that it is enclosed, heated, and drives more like a go-kart than a motorcycle. It's also safe for anyone 42 inches or taller, meaning that family members from three to 103 can go on Leadville ATV Tours' two-hour trips deep into the fourteener-rich landscape surrounding North America's highest incorporated city.

After picking out helmets and receiving safety and operating instructions in the three-year-old outfitter's headquarters on the southern end of downtown, we cross the street to where the UTVs are parked. Each group (up to six people) gets its own vehicle, and while the guide shows everyone how to use the two-way radios and hook up their own music, I buckle my son into the middle seat of the front bench. With my husband behind the wheel, the tour gets off to a slow start—literally, as speeds on the tour max out around 25 mph, and figuratively, as we make our way through the less-than-scenic outskirts of town.

Soon, however, we reach a steep berm meant to stop most vehicles from proceeding and giggle as our UTV's tracks carry us up and over the hump. From there, backcountry views you normally have to work very hard to reach on skis or snowshoes unfurl in every direction. Our guide points out old mine shafts and structures, significant peaks, and even an abandoned pickup truck.

On the first of several planned stops, we snap photos and have a snowball fight, postholing in the deep powder along the groomed track. Another young couple on the tour tells us they're visiting from Austin, Texas. They'd spent most of their time in Denver but wanted to catch some classic Rocky Mountain vistas, so they'd booked this trip for the woman's birthday. It was her first time experiencing snow.

I drive the next stretch, quickly getting comfortable steering the massive machine in the tracks of the UTV ahead of us and pushing the pedal to the floor when we hit an open field. It's not the same

IF YOU GO

What: Leadville ATV Tours, Six-Seat Machine

When: 9 a.m., noon, and 3 p.m. daily, year-round

Duration: Two hours

Cost: From $250 for up to four adults and two kids

Take Note: Riders must be 42 inches tall; if there are five or more riders, there's a weight limit of 700 pounds per UTV. Anyone 21 years or older with a license can drive.

Side Trip: Especially with kids, the nearly two-hour drive to Leadville makes for a long day, so book an overnight stay at the 139-year-old, recently renovated Delaware Hotel. The refreshed lobby has board games, a bar, and a hidden candy room.

David Clifford (2)

adrenaline rush I get carving down a blue run, but every time my three-year-old gasps in delight or points out an interesting evergreen, I'm glad to be sharing this adventure with him, even if it's a relatively tame one.

The last stop features an overlook of downtown Leadville and nearly 60 miles of undulating forest beyond it. Our guide pulls out a mug of steaming hot cocoa for us to enjoy while he offers to take more pictures of the group. The woman from Austin jumps on her boyfriend's back, and they pose with arms outstretched; my son makes snow angels nearby. The scene could be an advertisement for accessibility to Colorado's backcountry—and we're all thrilled to be a part of it. —*Jessica LaRusso*

Dan Leeth/Alamy Stock Photo

BACKCOUNTRY VIEWS YOU NORMALLY HAVE TO WORK VERY HARD TO REACH ON SKIS OR SNOWSHOES UNFURL IN EVERY DIRECTION.

WILL TRAVEL FOR POWDER

Three thrilling snowmobiling destinations outside of Colorado.

Destination:

Spearfish, South Dakota

Odometer: 395 miles (or 60 miles from Rapid City's airport)

Stoke Factor: This basecamp town connects riders to a network of more than 300 miles of trails—generally groomed from mid-December through March—primarily in the western swath of Black Hills National Forest. Ride through pine forests, canyons, and summitable hills before braking for a snack in the warming shelters spread throughout the area.

Destination:

Alpine, Wyoming

Odometer: 521 miles (or a one-hour drive from Jackson Hole's airport)

Stoke Factor: For a true powder experience (three to 12 feet deep, on average) with big mountain views, head to the Wyoming Range. The high-elevation area encompasses nearly 350 miles of trails, both groomed and natural, which are open from mid-December to mid-March. It's long been a favorite shooting location for snowsport filmmakers.

Destination:

West Yellowstone, Montana

Odometer: 638 miles or a direct flight to Yellowstone Airport (Bozeman, another nonstop option, is about 90 miles away)

Stoke Factor: Thanks to 160 inches of average annual snowfall, West Yellowstone is a top pick for serious riders, who can ply more than 400 miles of groomed trails straight from town into three national forests. Sledders can even ride to the top of the Continental Divide on the Two Top Mountain Trail (*pictured*).

RIP THE TRAILS

Extend the fun with these three full-day—or longer—snowmobile excursions.

1. Forget driving to the trailhead: Hop on the **Durango & Silverton Narrow Gauge Railroad** to enjoy its Snowmobile Adventure Package (from $335). The tracks lead to Cascade Canyon. There, Ice Pirates Backcountry Adventures will take over for a two-hour guided excursion (*pictured*) around 10,910-foot Molas Pass. Book through the railroad or the outfitter.

2. The direct, groomed **Sunlight to Powderhorn Trail**, which stretches between the two namesake ski resorts, from Glenwood Springs to Mesa, is 120 miles long. Another 180 miles of side trails offer fresh tracks and a snowy playground for experienced riders and newbies alike. Overnight at the Sunlight Inn or Electric Mountain Lodge so you can explore the next day, too.

3. Nestled into the rugged San Juan Mountains, **Sheepshead Cabins** is a destination for advanced riders. This snowmobile-accessed pair of lodges lives in the snowiest region of the state and requires riders to have experience with high-elevation navigation and deep powder sledding. (Wolf Creek Ski Area is only 10 miles away.) Explore 13,000-foot peaks and 40 acres of private land before bedding down in one of the eight-person backcountry cabins, for which you'll need to bring in your own food and water.

WHEN YOU WANT TO

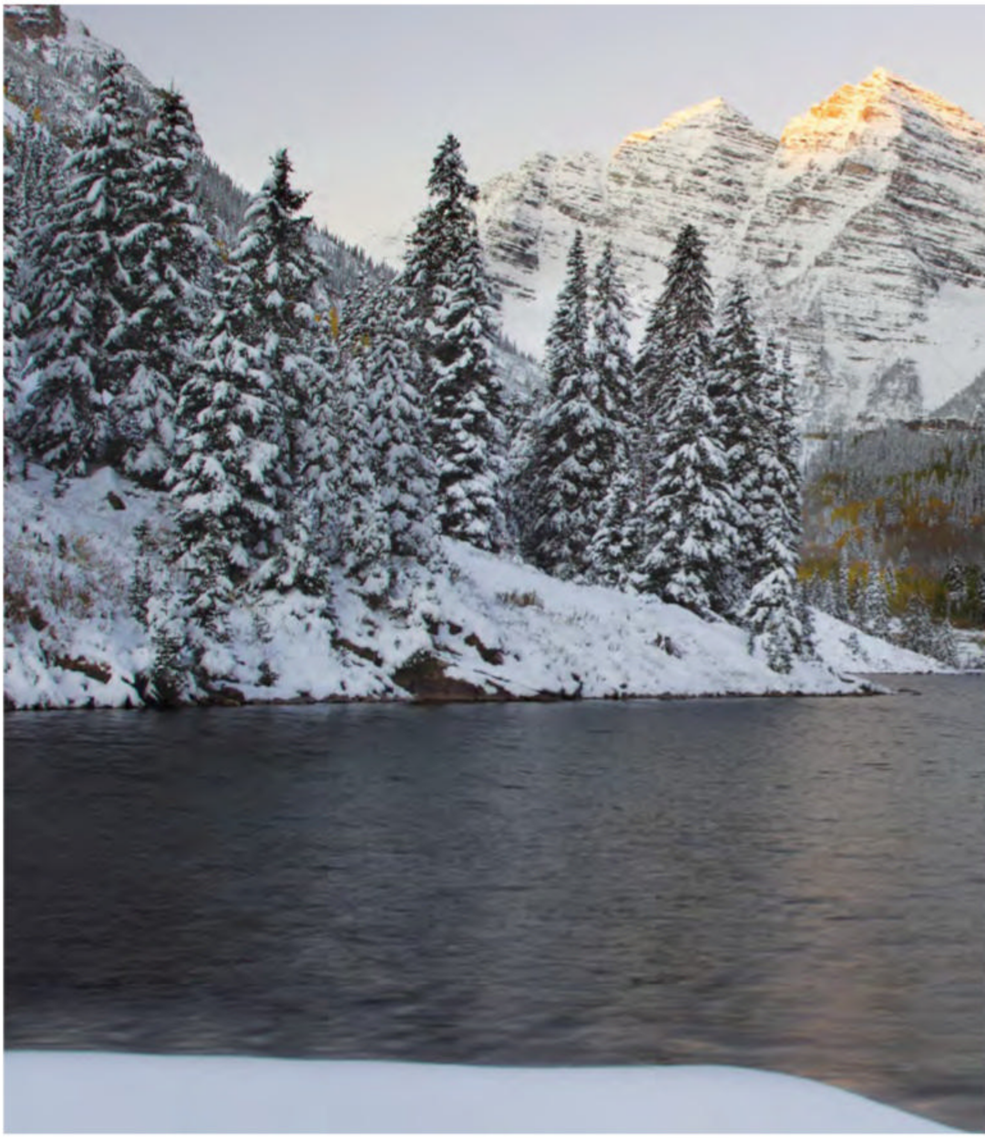
See Epic Views

BOOK A RIDE WITH: ASPEN'S T-LAZY-7 RANCH

The standing water in the parking lot was not a good sign. Neither was the clacking sound of snowmobile tracks rubbing on bare pavement. While I can't be blamed for Mother Nature's handiwork, I had erred in my scheduling: I'd booked my trip to Aspen's T-Lazy-7 Ranch for late March, and an early spring was quickly turning my hoped-for winter wonderland into a sloppy mess. The snowpack was too unstable to embark on the two-hour tour I had originally booked to see the iconic Maroon Bells from a fresh perspective: the seat of a snowmobile. I'd never viewed their postcard-worthy grandeur with a snowy backdrop and had been giddy with excitement on my drive west.

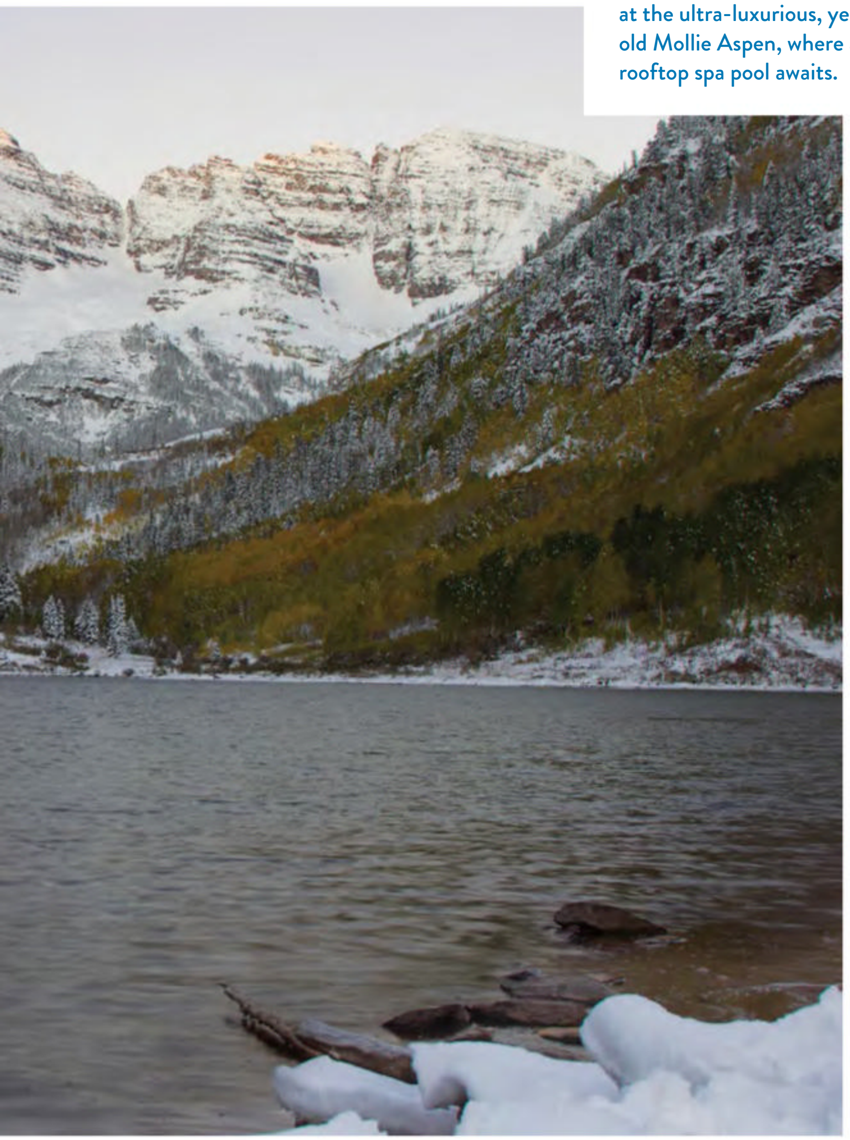
Now, I was frustrated with the change of plans. The ranch was offering a shorter excursion instead, which would at least mean I hadn't wasted the gas money to get here, but I was seeking epic beauty, not a trail ride. My mood lifted when the perky woman at

This spread, from left: Courtesy of Durango & Silverton Narrow Gauge Railroad; Getty Images; David Clifford



the registration window smiled at me and said, "It's a great day for snowmobiling. Pyramid Peak is beautiful!"

After getting fit for a helmet and buying hand warmers from the gift shop, I joined my group, which was crowded around six Arctic Cat snowmobiles for the requisite safety talk from T-Lazy-7 owner Rick Deane. Deane started running the snowmobile tours here in 1968. The rides traverse both private and national forest trails—routes that Deane knows well. His great-grandfather, Josiah Deane, was one of Aspen's founding fathers. (Dean Street in downtown Aspen is named after him, despite the misspelling.) And it was Deane's father who had, in 1938, purchased the 420 acres I was about to zoom across.



On the Maroon Bells trip, guests throttle up aspen-lined trails before being treated to hot chocolate and the eye candy that is Maroon Lake, nestled at the base of 14,022-foot North Maroon Peak and 14,163-foot Maroon Peak. Fortunately, in Colorado, there's always another peak to discover.

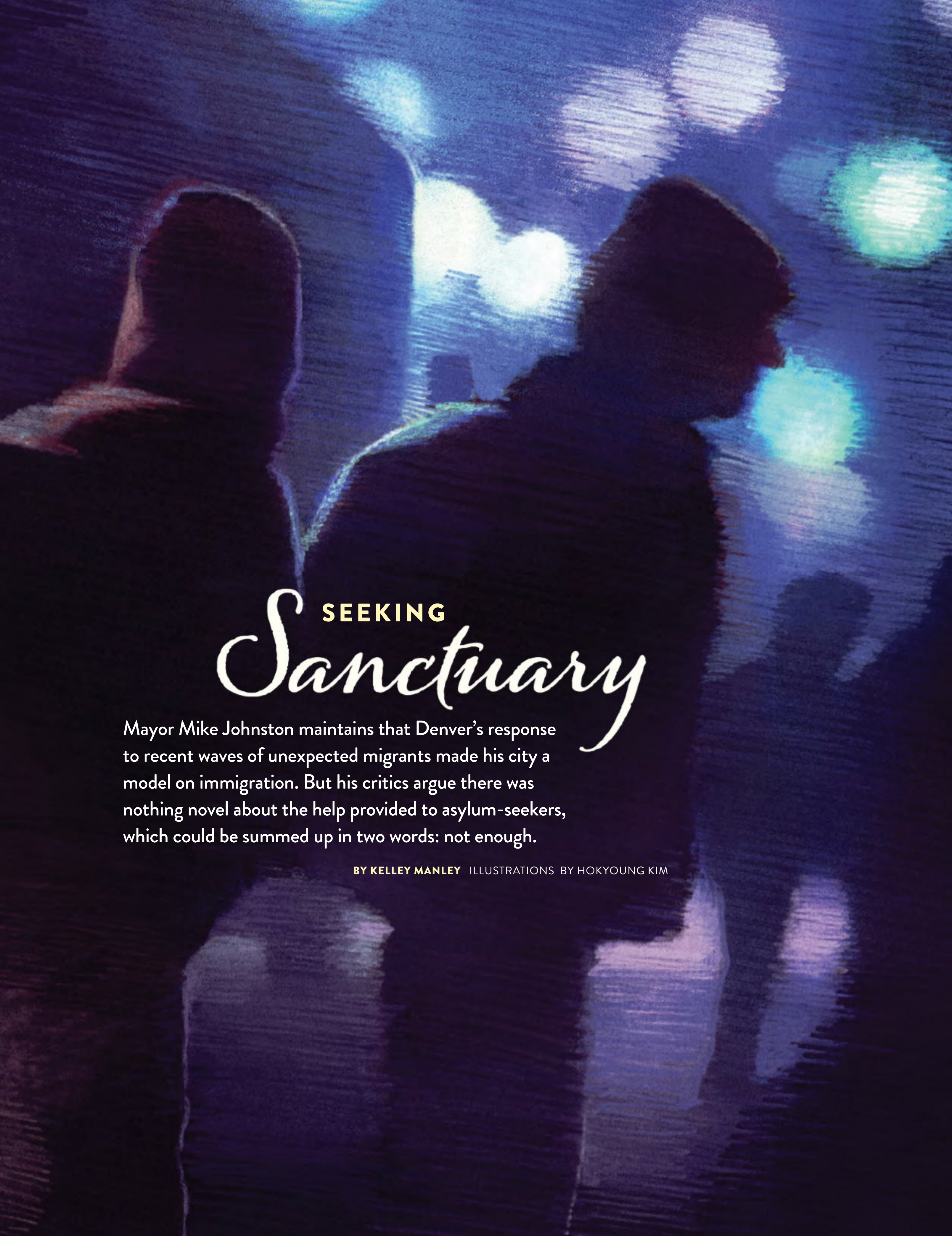
My rerouted ride started with some free-flowing fun. The T-Lazy-7 guides led us along a long, flat straightaway that allowed the group to get a feel for the machines before we found ourselves on a network of undulating paths that wound through the pines. Having never been on a snowmobile, I wasn't prepared for the speed or the rollercoaster-style belly somersaults I experienced as the vehicle navigated the up-and-down terrain. I let out more than a few whoops.

While the forested trails were lovely, I'd come to see big mountains. Following the tracks in front of me, I exited the tree-lined trails and slipped onto Maroon Creek Road, which isn't plowed during the winter. We sped southwest, past cross-country skiers and snowshoers with dogs, until the lead guide slowed to a crawl. I wanted to go faster, not brake. But then I looked up, and there it was: 14,029-foot Pyramid Peak in all its wintertime glory. It wasn't the Bells, but the unmistakable pointy fourteener was frosted with snow and standing sentinel over the valley against a cobalt sky. The lady at the window had been right: It was a beautiful day for snowmobiling. —*Lindsey B. King* ▲▲

IF YOU GO

What: T-Lazy-7 Ranch's Maroon Bells Tour
When: Tuesday through Saturday, November to April, at 9 a.m., 11:30 a.m., and 2:30 p.m.
Duration: Two hours
Cost: $275 for a single rider, $375 for a double
Take Note: Passengers must be at least four years old, and the driver (18 or older) needs a valid driver's license.
Backup Plan: T-Lazy-7 offers a 20 percent discount for the 1.5-hour Pyramid Peak trip.
Side Trip: Just 4.3 miles from the ranch, bed down at the ultra-luxurious, year-old Mollie Aspen, where a rooftop spa pool awaits.

HAVING NEVER BEEN ON A SNOWMOBILE, I WASN'T PREPARED FOR THE SPEED OR THE ROLLERCOASTER-STYLE BELLY SOMERSAULTS I EXPERIENCED.



SEEKING Sanctuary

Mayor Mike Johnston maintains that Denver's response to recent waves of unexpected migrants made his city a model on immigration. But his critics argue there was nothing novel about the help provided to asylum-seekers, which could be summed up in two words: not enough.

BY KELLEY MANLEY ILLUSTRATIONS BY HOKYOUNG KIM

Somewhere IN THE jungle

between Colombia and Panama, Lili began to pray. It was September 2023, and the then 33-year-old mother of two young sons was about two weeks into one of the most perilous migration routes in the world: the 3,000-mile journey by bus, boat, foot, and train from Venezuela to the United States.

Life under President Nicolás Maduro had become increasingly untenable. Elected in 2013, the autocratic ruler's fiscal policies and political cronyism had destroyed Venezuela's democratic institutions and economy, creating a country racked by corruption, unemployment, hyperinflation, and violent crime. In 2020, the U.S. Department of Justice charged his government with international drug trafficking, and the United Nations has accused Maduro's administration of using sexual violence and torture to stay in power. Ninety-one percent of the population lives in poverty, and more than a quarter of children are malnourished. Since 2014, more than seven million Venezuelans have fled its borders, fueling one of the biggest migrant crises in history.

Living in Valencia, the country's third-largest city, Lili (who asked that her last name be withheld for her family's protection) worked odd jobs. Her husband, 36, labored in construction. Together, they earned about $200 per month, barely enough to feed their boys, ages 10 and six. "There was no future for my children," Lili says. She hoped there would be one in the United States—and, specifically, in Denver, where a friend had said there was plenty of work.

Lili and her husband sold their refrigerator and washing machine and spent a month in Colombia working to help fund their journey north. They then paid a guide about $500 to navigate their family through the Darién Gap, a notoriously inhospitable 60-mile slip of rainforest that connects Central America and South America and teems with poisonous snakes, armed bandits, and disease. With the six-year-old on her husband's back and a pack—stuffed with little more than a change of clothes, 17 tins of tuna, and some sweets—on hers, they walked from dawn until dusk for three days, up and down mud-slicked hills. They watched as rivers, swollen by wet-season rains, swept children away when their families tried to cross. At night, Lili and her husband took turns sleeping with the boys sandwiched between them, listening for animals and thieves outside their tent. She'd never been religious, but throughout the journey—when her knees throbbed from hiking, when she passed rotting corpses and injured travelers left to die—Lili began to offer up both a prayer and a plea: "Please, God, let my family get through this." Soon, her younger son began to parrot her.

Finally, on November 5, after traveling through Panama, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Honduras, Guatemala, and Mexico, the family arrived in El Paso, Texas. Skinny and dark from the sun, they turned themselves in to a border patrol agent and declared their intention to file for asylum. Following one night in a detention center and another in a shelter, Lili heard from a nonprofit volunteer about a free bus headed to Colorado. Like many on the 36-person motor coach, Lili and her family didn't have much cash or a place to stay once they arrived in Denver. *At least we are in the United States*, thought Lili, whose coffee-colored eyes brim with optimism. *We made it*. About two hours south of Denver, the bus stopped for gas. Under a waning moon, an older man with white hair approached. "Are you guys migrants?" he asked in broken Spanish. "Are you from Venezuela?" He bought them chicken to eat, and Lili began to feel something like hope.

IN 2021, TEXAS Governor Greg Abbott launched Operation Lone Star, a controversial program enacted to counter a surge in border crossings in his state. As part of that effort, he began busing migrants to left-leaning cities across the country. The political stunt, which was also performed by the governors of Florida and Arizona, was both inhumane and genius. By transporting migrants—ultimately more than 100,000 people—to sanctuary cities, Abbott hefted the very real burden of immigration onto the communities who professed to care so much about the issue. Denver, almost a straight shot on I-25 from El Paso and controlled by Democrats, was a natural target.

The first bus of "newcomers," as the city of Denver prefers to call migrants, disembarked in December 2022. "It was staggering," says Evan Dreyer, deputy chief of staff for Mayor Michael Hancock, who left office in July 2023, and current Mayor Mike Johnston. "Not only in terms of the number of people who were arriving, but that they were arriving in nothing more than T-shirts, shorts, and flip-flops. It was the dead of winter." They were only portents of what was to come.

"NO ONE LEAVES THEIR
home and family,
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Lili and her family are among the more than 40,000 migrants, most of them Venezuelan, who have made their ways to Denver over the past two years—more per capita than any other city in the nation. In the absence of significant federal aid, Denver was forced to come up with ad hoc solutions. Johnston forecasted spending $180 million (10 to 15 percent of the city's annual budget) on immigrant services in 2024, an unexpected outlay that required the city to slash recreation center and Department of Motor Vehicle hours, cut millions of dollars from the police and fire departments, and forgo planting spring flowers in city parks. Some 200 new students enrolled in Denver Public Schools each week, and hospitals bowed under the weight of new patients. Meanwhile, immigration emerged as the centerpiece of the 2024 presidential election, and no place, according to President-elect Donald Trump, illustrated the Biden-Harris administration's failed policies better than Colorado, where, he alleged, violent Venezuelan gangs had taken control of Aurora.

Immigration surged under President Joe Biden, whose sweeping policy changes expanded legal pathways to enter, live, and work in the United States and also narrowed enforcement priorities, according to the Migration Policy Institute, a nonpartisan think tank. At the same time, pandemic travel restrictions loosened, the American economy began to recover from COVID-19, and conditions in immigrants' home countries—places like Venezuela, Nicaragua, and Guatemala—deteriorated. All of this sparked a mass migration north. Illegal crossings from Mexico spiked between 2021 and 2023, averaging two million per year, up from 1.4 million in 2019, according to the U.S. Customs and Border Patrol.

Rebecca Galemba and Lisa Martinez, co-directors of the University of Denver's Center for Immigration Policy and Research, caution that the surge must be understood in context: The Biden administration added border patrol agents and initiated new accounting methods that might count an illegal border crosser multiple times, factors that may have contributed to the ballooning numbers. In addition, Trump's "zero tolerance" immigration policies during his first term, including separating families and criminally prosecuting those who crossed illegally, had caused "a sharp decline in admissions," Martinez says. Denver simply wasn't ready for the rebound.

ON NOVEMBER 5, 2023, 12 hours after leaving El Paso, Lili's bus abruptly pulled over at a desolate corner. The driver opened the doors and said, "Welcome to Denver."

The family used the last of its funds to take a taxi to an immigrant welcome center, which in turn sent them to a Quality Inn in northwest Denver that the city had turned into a shelter for immigrants. Lili and her husband said they were asked to leave after 18 days, even though the limit for families was 37 days. They then connected with Amanda, a fortysomething Denverite who was looking for ways to help incoming immigrants. (Amanda also asked that her last name be withheld for her family's protection.) "No one leaves their home and family, walks through jungles and deserts, and puts their life on the line if things are OK where they come from," Amanda says. "I saw the news reports and thought, *OK, let's do this*." A friend involved in migrant outreach introduced her to Lili.

On December 1, 2023, Lili and her family moved into Amanda's basement apartment in Cheesman Park. Amanda got straight to work helping her guests establish a life in Denver: She took them to a doctor, arranged under-the-table jobs, set them up on Venmo, and got them bus passes. Colorado public schools cannot deny students admission based on immigration status, so Amanda enrolled the boys in local schools. Lili liked Denver and said she found it peaceful. While she was surprised there wasn't more work, she remained hopeful.

Thousands of other immigrants, however, struggled to find stable housing. On a frigid morning in January 2024, I visited a migrant encampment near the Quality Inn that had first sheltered Lili, her husband, and their sons. About 300 Venezuelans filled a blockslong sea of tents: Babies snuggled on mattresses under heaps of blankets; young men kicked a soccer ball around; a mother with a fever-stricken toddler pleaded for help from volunteers. Around 9 a.m., a tent burst into flames, the fire consuming all of someone's worldly possessions.

This was at the height of the immigration crisis, when more than 200 people arrived in Denver each day and some 5,000 migrants crammed into the 10 hotels the city used as temporary shelters, which spilled over into encampments like this one. During the previous month, U.S. Customs and Border Control had recorded 250,000 migrant encounters at the United States–Mexico border, the highest ever, and 144 buses of newcomers had arrived in Denver. “We were totally full,” Mayor Johnston told me this past October.

Like Lili, many of the immigrants I spoke to at the encampment had survived unthinkable things on their ways to the United States—seeing kids starve to death in the jungle and parents who were forced to abandon children who refused to go on. They’d also been touched by the generosity of Denverites, who showed up daily at the encampment to give them food, clothes, and jobs. “Denver, Colorado, has been a huge blessing,” one migrant said, even as they were being forced to move again.

On the day of my visit, the city was preparing to clear the encampment. A convoy of idling buses waited to ferry families to shelters or leased units the city would help pay for. Denver also offered to cover the cost of bus tickets to municipalities farther afield that weren’t so strained or where migrants might have intended to go before being dropped in Denver. (Ultimately, the city purchased 22,000 tickets for onward travel at a cost of $7.5 million. While Johnston’s staff says it simply helped migrants get where they had intended to go or might be better served, Utah Governor Spencer Cox slammed the practice. “We recently learned that the Democrat mayor of Denver has been sending illegal immigrants to Utah without proper notification or approval,” Cox posted on X this past June. “This is completely unacceptable.”)

> “FOR US, THE *fundamental strategy* WAS, ‘HOW DO YOU GET PEOPLE TO WORK AS REGULARLY AND EARLY AND OFTEN AS POSSIBLE?’ ”

City workers, volunteers, and activists fanned out across the camp to tell the migrants that they had to vacate the property. Some were scared. Many couldn’t leave Denver because they had immigration court dates here and changing venues is extremely burdensome. Some simply wanted to stay in their makeshift homes with the many items—bikes, toys, kitchen supplies, mattresses—they had collected since arriving in the States. A group of about a half-dozen Venezuelans gathered around a volunteer. *Where will they take us?* they asked. *Can we bring our things?* The volunteer explained that they would go to a shelter and could only bring two bags of belongings with them. *Can we stay together?* It was a query the volunteer couldn’t answer. *If we are going to be separated in the shelters*, they said, *we would rather stay together on the streets*.

ON DECEMBER 22, 2023, Colorado Democrats, including U.S. senators Michael Bennett and John Hickenlooper, penned a letter to the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) asking for funding for the communities in the state absorbing the inflow of migrants. FEMA ultimately awarded Denver $37 million—a fraction of the $5 billion that Johnston and the mayors of New York, Chicago, Los Angeles, and Houston had collectively requested in an October 2023 letter to Biden.

The situation here reflected the frustrating reality that cities and states bear the costs of the immigration crisis but have little say over federal policy. A few weeks later, Johnston visited Washington, D.C., where he marshaled a coalition of mayors in lobbying Congress for aid. They wanted three things: more federal money, expedited work authorization, and a coordinated entry plan that would thoughtfully distribute migrants to cities around the country. “Any one of those things would have been enough,” Johnston says.

At that point, a bipartisan group of U.S. senators was working to hammer out the most sweeping immigration reform in decades. The $118 billion bill proposed building additional border barriers, beefing up the ranks of border patrol agents, and adding more immigration court judges to tackle the yearslong backlog of asylum cases. This past February, Johnston heard that the deal had died, largely due to Trump, who called on his congressional allies to torpedo it. “They knew that it would fundamentally address the crisis,” Johnston says, “and you wouldn’t have a campaign issue for 2024.” The mayor says he was terrified. “We realized,” he says, “no one’s coming to save us.”

Throughout the crisis, Johnston says, local CEOs had been telling him, “Mike, I have 50 open jobs. Why can’t I hire any of these folks who have arrived?” And the mayor heard weekly from immigrants who said, “I don’t want any charity. All I want is a job.” Most of the migrants in Denver were asylum-seekers, a status that meant they would be eligible to work six months after submitting their immigration paperwork. Applying for asylum is a complicated and expensive process that can take 20 to 40 hours of legal work, though, and the six-month clock doesn’t begin ticking until the documents are filed correctly. Frustrated by the federal government’s inaction, Johnston began talking to constitutional law scholars and officials from the departments of Homeland Security and Justice to find a way to legally bypass the country’s cumbersome immigration system. “For us,” Johnston says, “the fundamental strategy was, ‘How do you get people to work as regularly and early and often as possible?’ ”

After weeks of hashing out a plan with his team, Johnston, dressed in a gray suit and crisp white shirt, announced his ambitious new vision during a press conference on April 10, 2024. “We think we’ve now cracked the code on how to help people,” Johnston said. His Denver Asylum Seekers Program (DASP) promised to partner with select nonprofits to offer a total of about 850 migrants housing support, workforce training, and legal assistance in applying for asylum and work permits—at an approximate cost to the city of $1,700 per person. By pivoting from a short-term emergency response that offered thousands of people food and shelter indefinitely, Johnston estimated that Denver would save $90 million and avoid cuts to essential public services.

DASP was both simple and innovative: Johnston’s team would enlist an army of pro bono immigration lawyers to help immigrants file their asylum and work authorization paperwork, avoiding errors in the process and, therefore, completing the necessary documentation more expeditiously. Then, instead of viewing the six-month waiting period as dead time, Denver would use the interlude to “train up a new fleet of workers and help families find their footing,” city spokesperson Jon Ewing says.

In practice, the city and its nonprofit partners would help migrants secure their own apartments, offer them courses in English and financial and digital literacy, and give them cell phones, food stamps, laptops, and bus passes—all on Denver’s dime. As part of the Work Ready arm of DASP, immigrants would receive guidance from career coaches and undergo 20 hours per week of workforce training in one of four industries the city had identified as short-staffed: hospitality, construction, health care, and early childhood education. At the end of the six-month program, migrants would, in theory, receive a temporary work permit and be directed to partner organizations such as the nonprofit El Centro de los Trabajadores for help finding a job. "We have had a terrific experience with these newcomers working for us," says Mark Berzins, the CEO of Little Pub Company, which owns 17 Denver-area bars and restaurants, including the British Bulldog, and employs a dozen or so DASP participants, with plans to add more. For migrants not selected for DASP, Denver intended to organize clinics during which pro bono immigration lawyers would provide legal aid for asylum and work authorization. To qualify for DASP, applicants had to be eligible for asylum, had to not have entered the country via the CBP One app (an online immigration tool whose users are already fast-tracked for work authorization), and had to be staying in the city's shelter system or receiving housing support from one of its nonprofit partners on April 10, 2024 (not one day before or after).

Studies back Johnston's hypothesis that investing in immigrants up front can have long-term benefits. According to a 2016 paper by the National Academies of Science, it costs $1,600 per year to welcome a first-generation immigrant, but the children of immigrants are "among the strongest economic and fiscal contributors in the U.S. population," the study says, contributing more in taxes per capita than the native-born population. Here in Colorado, undocumented immigrants added $436.5 million in state and local taxes in 2022, a number that would climb to more than $500 million if they were granted work authorization, according to the Colorado Fiscal Institute, a left-leaning nonprofit.

Johnston's announcement was gilded in optimism—by helping a smaller group of migrants, the city was investing in them and the city's future—but that sentiment obscured a more immediate reality. Denver would begin closing its long-term migrant shelters the day after the press conference. From then on, immigrants could count on only 72 hours of temporary housing and, for those who did not qualify for DASP, free fares to other cities. The city encouraged migrants to take advantage of nonprofits around town. In short, Johnston planned to save most of that $90 million by curtailing services. The city even dispatched employees to El Paso to spread the word to immigrants that Denver couldn't offer much help should they choose to settle here.

Jennifer Piper, of the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC), a Philadelphia-based social justice nonprofit, works on immigrants' rights in Denver and believes that DASP—and its rollout—was poorly conceived, disorganized, and badly executed. The city gave local nonprofits, which had been critical to the migrant response, little notice about DASP and the long-term shelters closing. As a result, nonprofits had to scramble to help migrants find housing. "There was no grace period while they stood the program up," Piper says. "The 800 people in the program had nowhere to go." She also says the criteria for DASP were too restrictive and that there was never any clear information about where and how to enroll. (A city spokesperson said that it held an informational session where prospective asylum-seekers could sign up.) And while Piper believes the bones of the program are good, the idea that work authorizations for asylum-seekers would be efficiently processed by the end of the six-month training period was a pipe dream. She also alleges that a city employee is still in El Paso, discouraging migrants from traveling to Denver. (Ewing acknowledges that a part-time employee is there but says their job is to provide accurate information to newcomers about Denver's "available resources.")

Housekeys Action Network Denver, an advocacy group for Denver's houseless population, is even more damning in its condemnation. In an April statement, the nonprofit demanded that the mayor "own up to his blatant and damaging lies regarding migrant support and offer an actual solution for people who are desperate for chances to work and opportunities to build a life for themselves and their families."

CONTINUED ON PAGE 84

16
15
14
13
16
18
20
22
200
400
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DENVER'S

Top Lawyers

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To compile the list, *5280* contracted with DataJoe Research—a Lakewood-based software and research company specializing in data collection and verification that conducts various nominations across the United States on behalf of publishers. To create the list, DataJoe facilitated an online peer-voting process and then paired this with an Internet research process to identify success characteristics. DataJoe checked and confirmed that each winner had, at time of review, a current, active license with the appropriate state regulatory board. In addition, DataJoe checked available public sources to identify lawyers disciplined for an infraction by the state regulatory board—and removed them if necessary.

Both *5280* and DataJoe recognize that there are many fine lawyers who are not represented on this list because, after all, inclusion is based on the opinions of responding lawyers in the region. DataJoe works hard to ensure fair voting, but results of surveys and Internet research campaigns are not objective metrics.

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CONTINUED ON PAGE 86

2025 TOP LAWYER PROFILES

5280 CONGRATULATES THIS YEAR'S TOP LAWYERS

INDEX OF PROFILES

ALANA M. ANZALONE..........62
Medical Malpractice: Plaintiff

BAM FAMILY LAW PC..........73
Family Law and Divorce

BURG SIMPSON ELDREDGE HERSH & JARDINE, P.C...........59
Construction Defect Litigation, Medical Malpractice: Plaintiff, Personal Injury: Plaintiff, Workers' Compensation: Claimant

CHAYET & DANZO..........62
Probate Litigation

CIANCIO CIANCIO BROWN, P.C...........64
Family Law and Divorce, Personal Injury: Plaintiff, Appellate, Civil

COLORADO ADVOCATES..........73
Government Relations/Contracts/Lobbying

DAVIS & CERIANI, PC..........74
Securities

FARACI LEASURE, LLC..........70
Medical Malpractice: Defense

FENNEMORE..........67
Alternative Dispute Resolution, Commercial, Real Estate, Securities

FISHER & PHILLIPS LLP..........72
Labor/Employment: Defense

FOSTER GRAHAM MILSTEIN & CALISHER..........64
Mergers & Acquisitions, Personal Injury: Plaintiff, Real Estate, Alternative Dispute Resolution, Appellate, Banking, Civil, Commercial, Construction, Criminal, Estate Planning, Medical Malpractice: Defense, Government Relations/Contracts/Lobbying

FRAZER-ABEL | KELLY, LLC..........75
Elder

GRIFFITHS LAW PC..........65
Family Law and Divorce, Construction Defect Litigation, Appellate

THE HARRIS LAW FIRM..........60–61
Family Law and Divorce, Estate Planning, Tax: Personal

HERNÁNDEZ & ASSOCIATES, PC..........75
Immigration

HOGAN OMIDI, P.C...........66
Family Law and Divorce

IRELAND STAPLETON..........68
Real Estate, Tax: Personal

ICENOGLE SEAVER POGUE PC..........76
Transportation

JAMS DENVER..........66
Alternative Dispute Resolution, Insurance

KERRANE STORZ, PC..........70
Construction Defect Litigation

KINNETT & CORDES..........72
Family Law and Divorce

KOLKO & CASEY, P.C...........76
Immigration

LATHROP GPM LLP..........73
Probate Litigation

THE LAW OFFICE OF NICOAL C. SPERRAZZA..........71
Family Law and Divorce

LEGAL HELP IN COLORADO..........76
Personal Injury: Plaintiff

LEVENTHAL PUGA BRALEY P.C...........63
Medical Malpractice: Plaintiff

LEWIS BRISBOIS BISGAARD & SMITH..........74
Antitrust

MONCLOVA LAW PC..........72
Immigration

MYRIGHTS IMMIGRATION LAW FIRM..........69
Immigration

SCOTT L. EVANS..........74
Alternative Dispute Resolution

SHERR PUTTMANN AKINS LAMB PC..........71
Family Law and Divorce

TARA M. MAGER, ESQ..........69
Personal Injury: Plaintiff

TONY WISE..........75
Securities

THRIVE FAMILY LAW LLC..........70
Family Law and Divorce

WELLS FAMILY LAW, P.C...........68
Family Law and Divorce

WILLOUGHBY & ASSOCIATES..........68
Family Law and Divorce

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2025 TOP LAWYER • 5X WINNER

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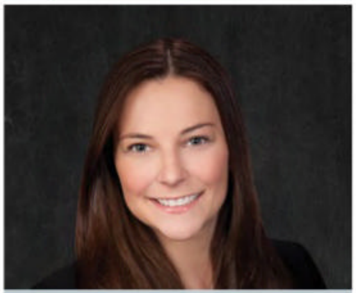

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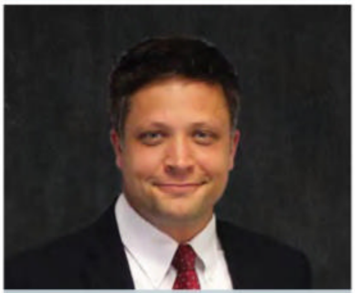

MICHAEL C. MENGHINI
2025 TOP LAWYER • 1X WINNER

FIRM BACKGROUND | Michael S. Burg established the firm in 1976 and was joined by Peter Burg, Alan Simpson, Scott Eldredge, David Hersh, and Kerry Jardine to build one of the top trial firms in the nation with over 60 Lawyers.

MISSION | To be Good Lawyers. Changing Lives®. It's not just a slogan, it's who we are.

PASSION | We want to change peoples' lives for the better by fighting for them in court and securing fair compensation.

ADVERSARIES | Anyone who injures or attempts to take advantage of our clients.

NATIONAL LEADERSHIP APPOINTMENTS | Norfolk Southern Train Derailment, East Palestine, OH, YAZ®/Yasmin®, Pradaxa®, Ortho Evra®, Gadolinium-based contrast agents, Heparin®, DePuy ASR®, Bextra®/Celebrex®, Zyprexa®, Testosterone Replacement Therapy, Lawrence/Andover, Massachusetts Gas Explosion Cases.

ACCOLADES | 18 Super Lawyers® 2025; 23 Best Lawyers® in America 2025; #1 National Products Liability Firm—Martindale Hubbell; #1 Product Liability, Mass Tort, and Class Action Plaintiffs in Pharmaceutical and Medical Device Litigation—The U.S. Legal 500; Top 25 Most Influential Law Firms—The National Trial Lawyers.

RESULTS | $2 Billion+ in settlements, judgments, and verdicts; 200-plus recoveries in excess of $1 million.

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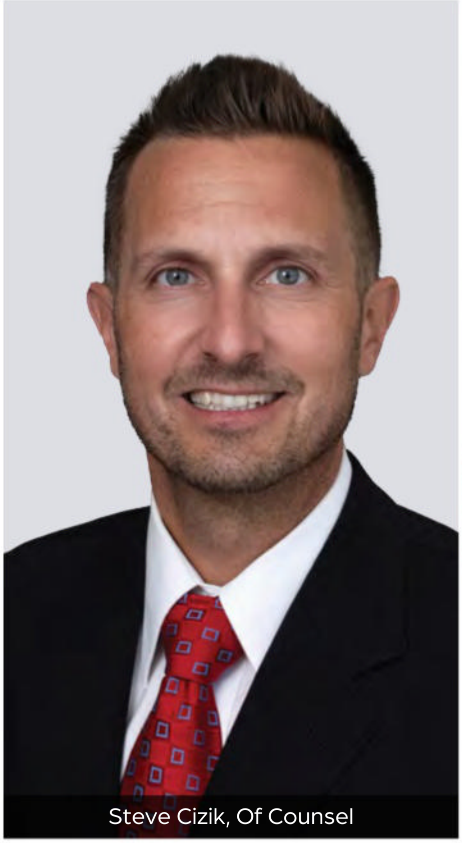
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ERIC LIMEGROVER 2025 TOP LAWYER • 1X WINNER

Since our founding in 1993, The Harris Law Firm has been dedicated to supporting individuals and families through crucial legal and personal transitions. Our commitment has always been to deliver the best possible outcomes for our clients through compassionate and effective representation. We proudly offer a full range of services including divorce, child custody, family law, tax law, and estate planning. Additionally, our innovative LawYourWay℠ clinic provides individuals representing themselves with access to customizable, unbundled legal advice, ensuring they receive professional guidance tailored to their specific needs. Our WeCare℠ Department checks in with clients throughout their representation at no cost, ensuring excellent service, and offering valuable information and free resources. We are grateful for the trust our clients and local communities have placed in us during both the joyful and challenging moments of their lives. This trust has been instrumental in earning us recognition, such as being named 5280's Face of Family Law, Colorado Super Lawyers®, Business of Law Digest's Best Places to Work, and our selection as a Tier 1 Colorado Family Law Firm by Best Law Firms®, among others.

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MARCO CHAYET **2025 TOP LAWYER • 11X WINNER**

TAMARA TRUJILLO **2X WINNER**

For the past 20 years, Chayet & Danzo, LLC has focused our practice on the needs of families, the elderly, and at-risk members of the Denver metro area and throughout the state of Colorado. Our team of attorneys and staff are dedicated to providing the highest quality legal services in a cost-effective and personal manner for every elder law issue, estate plan, and probate litigation case.

Mr. Chayet is the founder and managing partner of Chayet & Danzo, LLC and ColoradoElderLaw.com. He is the public administrator for the 18th Judicial District and teaches elder law as an adjunct professor at the University of Colorado Law School, where he received his Juris Doctor. Mr. Chayet is awarded as a Top Attorney in both elder law and probate litigation.

Senior attorney Tamara Trujillo joined the firm in 2009. Ms. Trujillo is a Certified Elder Law Attorney by the National Elder Law Foundation and is a past director of the National Academy of Elder Law Attorneys. She is an adjunct professor of elder law at the University of Colorado Law School and is awarded as a top elder law attorney.

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Who I Am: I am Alana Anzalone, and I am passionate about understanding what really matters when representing victims of someone else's wrongdoing. I believe that, without a connection, it is impossible to truly advocate for my clients. Connection allows me to tell their real story and their experiences to an insurance company or a jury. The relationship is a true partnership and something to fight for.

A True Trial Lawyer: I have a proven track record of obtaining successful results for my clients. I am not afraid to take a case to trial—in front of a jury—to obtain true justice and a full, uncompromised reward for my clients. I recently obtained one of the top verdicts in Colorado in a personal injury trial. I have been a Colorado Super Lawyers Rising Star since 2017, a Colorado Super Lawyer since 2023, a Top 40 Under 40 National Trial Lawyer since 2016, and a member of the Million Dollar Advocates Forum.

What I Do: I focus my advocacy on medical malpractice, nursing home negligence, and personal injury.

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JAMES PUGA 2025 TOP LAWYER • 6X WINNER

University of Denver College of Law, 1989

Jim Leventhal has been practicing for 50 years and is considered one of the best plaintiff medical malpractice lawyers in the country. He prides himself on meticulously working up and trying cases. He recognizes the gravity of being hired and trusted to represent a person or family, as well as the impact of the firm's work. As a result, the firm is the most successful plaintiff malpractice law firm in Colorado every year.

Leventhal Puga Braley P.C. is best known for its expertise, its great trial lawyers, and putting the interests of its clients first. It also has an astonishing success rate. Jim is proud of the impact the firm has on the lives of its clients, including the positive changes in the practice of medicine that have resulted from the firm's work.

James Puga has been practicing for over 35 years, guided by a single simple concept: He would rather win than be right. What matters most to him is achieving justice for his clients, which results in James challenging the trial team to question anything and everything. James is most proud of the lives he has changed and improved. His goal is to be remembered not for jury verdicts or settlements but for being honest, being fair, and always pushing to do the right thing.

The team at Leventhal Puga Braley P.C. is passionate about achieving justice for all involved in each case. They pursue justice for each and every client with determination. The firm's ethics are above reproach, with Leventhal Puga Braley P.C. being the most trusted personal injury and medical malpractice law firm in Colorado.

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Griffiths Law is a full-service family law and civil litigation firm located in South Denver serving clients across the state of Colorado. This year, we proudly congratulate our team members who have been recognized as 5280 Top Lawyers. Suzanne Griffiths, our president, CEO, and co-founder, along with our esteemed shareholders Duncan Griffiths, Christopher Griffiths, and Eliza Steinberg, have earned this prestigious honor. Their exceptional expertise and dedication to their clients continue to set Griffiths Law apart in the legal community. At Griffiths Law, our attorneys excel at the things that matter most to you: your financial well-being, your business, your children, and your peace of mind. For over 20 years, Griffiths Law has been dedicated to protecting and fighting for our clients, ensuring the highest quality legal services are always provided. Whether in family law or civil litigation, our team's commitment to excellence and client care remains at the core of everything we do. The firm's unrivaled team of family law attorneys can assist you with any aspect of family law, including divorce, child custody, child support, and maintenance. Our civil litigation attorneys deal with cases involving construction defects, insurance, real estate, corporate, and partnership matters. In addition to advocating for our clients, we take great pride in fostering a positive and supportive work environment for our team. We are thrilled to have recently won the 2024 ColoradoBiz Magazine Top Company award. This award reflects our commitment to building a culture of collaboration, respect, and excellence.

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FAMILY LAW AND DIVORCE

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Kathleen "Kathy" Hogan wrote the book on family law in Colorado. She devotes her practice primarily to complex financial cases, parental responsibilities, and child-custody-related issues. Other areas of expertise include prenuptial agreements and appeals in all areas of family law.

Halleh Omidi counsels clients on all the various aspects of dissolution of marriage cases, including complex asset division, allocation of parental responsibilities, child support, maintenance, paternity, post-decree modifications, prenuptial agreements, and appeals. She is experienced in litigation; however, when litigation is not required, Halleh negotiates with opposing counsel/opposing parties for an optimal outcome.

Their firm handles cases throughout the state of Colorado.

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JAMS Denver proudly congratulates Kate E. Craigmile, Steven C. Choquette, and Jon F. Sands on being named *5280*'s Top Lawyers of 2025! Kate and Steve were recognized for their work in alternative dispute resolution, while Jon received this honor for his expertise in insurance law.* We celebrate their achievements and reaffirm our commitment to excellence. Together with all of JAMS Denver's accomplished neutrals, they are dedicated to meeting the needs of parties and lawyers in mediation, arbitration, private judging, special master appointments, and insurance appraisals.

**Jon F. Sands is no longer taking insurance cases; he now practices alternative dispute resolution law.*

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Pictured, left to right: Zaki Robbins, Dan Reilly, David Arkell, Thomas List

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Bachelor of Arts: 2013, University of Denver; Juris Doctor (J.D.): 2019, University of Denver Sturm College of Law

Chelsea is a shareholder of Wells Family Law, P.C., alongside Kristi Wells (left) and Kaela Zihlman (right). Chelsea has a realistic, down-to-earth approach to navigating the complex nuances of family law by implementing creative and thoughtful strategies to resolve conflict and minimize harm to families.

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FAMILY LAW AND DIVORCE

Willoughby & Associates

KIM WILLOUGHBY **2025 TOP LAWYER • 8X WINNER**

Kim's practice is devoted to matrimonial law, estate planning, and prenuptial agreements. She is the nation's only attorney admitted to the American Academy of Matrimonial Lawyers and the American College of Trust and Estate Counsel. She provides representation and expert witness services. Kim founded I Do Prenups, LLC.

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2025 TOP LAWYER • 3X WINNER

Tara Mager's passion is advocating for and seeking justice on behalf of her clients. Her practice focuses on personal injury, traumatic brain and spinal cord injuries, amusement park accidents, insurance bad faith, and wrongful death cases. She has spent most of her life working with injured victims and knows firsthand how injuries change lives. Tara takes pride in providing personalized, compassionate, and aggressive representation to every client.

Supporting the community and advocating for children has always been close to Tara's heart. She works closely with the Yellow Brick Road Project, the Colorado Breast Cancer Awareness Foundation, and Make-A-Wish Colorado. Tara is a proud member of the Make-A-Wish Colorado Wishmakers Council.

This is the third year Tara has been recognized as a *5280* Top Lawyer. She has been recognized as a National Trial Lawyers Top 40 Under 40, as a Rising Star in Personal Injury Law by the American Institute of Legal Advocates, as one of the Top 40 Young Lawyers by the National Alliance of Women in the Law, as a Lawyer of Distinction in the field of Personal Injury, and as a Super Lawyers Rising Star since 2019. Mager Law Group has been recognized as one of the Best Law Firms in America by the National Institute of Trial Lawyers.

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For over 20 years, the attorneys at Kerrane Storz have represented thousands of property owners dealing with construction defects against developers, builders, and their insurance companies. The firm advances all expert costs related to litigation and handles cases on a contingency fee basis. The attorneys at Kerrane Storz are known for their exemplary communication with clients and for treating clients as equal partners. The firm has collected over $500 million in settlements and judgments for their clients.

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Sherr Puttmann Akins Lamb is a full-service family law firm specializing in divorce, legal separation, child custody, juvenile law, and many other areas of family law.

Megan M. Sherr is a founding shareholder and CEO of Sherr Puttmann Akins Lamb PC. Megan has an extensive background in family law and vast legal experience successfully litigating and negotiating all types of family law cases, with an emphasis on legally complex and high-net-worth cases. Megan's drive, work ethic, tenacity, and compassion have earned her high marks from her clients and peers.

David A. Lamb is a founding shareholder and CTO of Sherr Puttmann Akins Lamb PC and is a seasoned family law and trial attorney. David's practice includes divorce, custody disputes, and post-decree litigation. He has been on the faculty of the National Institute for Trial Advocacy and the Colorado Family Law Institute and assists families as a mediator, PC/DM, and arbitrator.

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FAMILY LAW AND DIVORCE

The Law Office of Nicoal C. Sperrazza

NICOAL SPERRAZZA
2025 TOP LAWYER • 5X WINNER

Nicoal C. Sperrazza provides support to clients regarding family law and divorce and also specializes in prenuptial/marital agreements and cohabitation agreements. With her background in customer service, Ms. Sperrazza enjoys the opportunity to interact with her clients in a personal way. She is a passionate advocate and has a reputation for providing highly personalized counsel to her clients. Ms. Sperrazza is well-versed in managing high-asset, complex, and contentious matters.

In addition to being selected as a 5280 Top Lawyer for five consecutive years, she was also selected as a Super Lawyer from 2020-2024. Ms. Sperrazza was honored as a 2022 Denver Bar Association's Pro Bono Star and serves as Immediate Past President of the Denver Bar Association.

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IMMIGRATION

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MARIA GUADALUPE MONCLOVA

2025 TOP LAWYER • 3X WINNER

Maria has been practicing law for 16 years and is the founder of Monclova Law P.C. As a young girl, she dreamed of becoming an immigration attorney to ensure that immigrants have equal access to the judicial system. Maria gets to know her clients on a personal level and becomes her clients' lawyer, friend, and therapist. Through the years, Maria has been able to stop many deportations and keep families together. Maria specializes in deportation defense, family immigration, and humanitarian visas for victims of crime and persecution.

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LABOR/EMPLOYMENT: DEFENSE

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With more than 25 years of experience in management-side labor and employment law, Vance Knapp represents a range of publicly traded companies, closed corporations, and nonprofit employers in federal and state court litigation and administrative proceedings throughout the U.S. Since joining Fisher & Phillips in April 2023, Vance has conducted over 20 complex workplace investigations throughout the U.S. and internationally for publicly traded companies, governmental employers, and nonprofit organizations.

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Danaé Kinnett Woody received her J.D. from the University of Denver ('12). She focuses her practice on complex as well as collaborative dissolutions of marriage, parental rights, and appeals. Danaé is a leader in the Denver Bar Association and CBA-CLE and is a founder of the Federal Limited Appearance Program in Colorado.

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FAMILY LAW AND DIVORCE

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2025 TOP LAWYER • 1X WINNER

Kyle McFarlane is the co-founding partner of BAM Family Law PC. Kyle specializes in high-conflict, high-asset family law matters. In Kyle's years as a family law attorney, she has won numerous awards, including being named to the Top 25 Most Influential Young Professions in Business by ColoradoBiz in 2019. Kyle is a skilled litigator in the courtroom and is also on the faculty for the University of Denver Sturm College of Law, where she teaches law students trial advocacy. Kyle has litigated many complicated custody and financial matters all over Colorado has received high praise from her clients.

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Colorado Advocates formulates winning advocacy strategies to help our clients successfully navigate the complex intersection of Colorado law, legislation, regulation, and politics. **Thank you, 5280, and congratulations to our fellow 2025 Top Lawyers!**

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Todd has more than 30 years of experience representing corporate clients as an advisor and in litigation involving antitrust and competition, securities and financial fraud, and related complex commercial matters. Todd has extensive experience in class actions and multidistrict litigation. He is also the national chair of the firm's antitrust group.

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VALERI PAPPAS 2025 TOP LAWYER • 4X WINNER

Valeri Pappas's litigation experience includes participating in all phases of multimillion-dollar litigation, jury trials, and arbitrations. Valeri's securities experience is primarily in representing aggrieved institutional and individual investors in securities fraud actions. Her practice areas also include employment matters, commercial litigation, and general civil litigation.

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ALTERNATIVE DISPUTE RESOLUTION

Scott L. Evans

2025 TOP LAWYER • 2X WINNER

Mr. Evans earned his J.D. from the University of Denver Sturm College of Law. He earned his B.S. from Colorado State University–Pueblo.

Scott Evans, a shareholder in Buchalter's Denver office and an American Arbitration Association arbitrator litigates and arbitrates complex trade secrets, employee mobility, white-collar crime, cannabis/hemp, and real estate matters. He also conducts internal fraud and employment investigations, calling on his experience as a federal investigator.

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IMMIGRATION

Hernández & Associates, PC

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2025 TOP LAWYER • 4X WINNER

As a removal defense attorney and adjunct professor of immigration law at the University of Denver Sturm College of Law, Christine M. Hernández is often the last line of defense in deportation proceedings, fighting for her clients to remain in the U.S. with their families. Christine's approach to the practice of immigration law is best described as zealous, fearless, and creative.

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Counsel at Frazer-Abel Law specializes in elder law, probate administration and litigation, guardianships and conservatorships, estate and special needs planning, public benefits, settlement planning, and fiduciary work. Attorneys Virginia Frazer-Abel, Eric Kelly, Geoffrey Carpenter, and Kailie Wilson are committed to providing clients with the highest level of legal representation and oversee legal needs with honesty and integrity.

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University of California Law School San Francisco — J.D. (2006)

Kolko & Casey, P.C. is a boutique immigration law firm serving employers, individuals, and families in their U.S. immigration needs. Our stellar team of attorneys—Jennifer Casey, Angela Cifor, Andrea Sweeney, and Petula McShiras—are passionate about the immigrant community and the people we serve.

Kolko & Casey P.C.
Immigration Attorneys & Counselors at Law

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PERSONAL INJURY: PLAINTIFF

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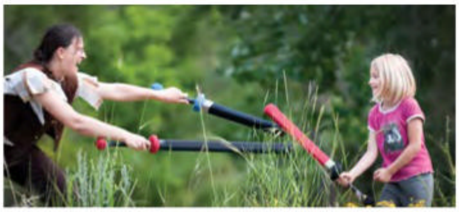

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5280 CAMP GUIDE

JANUARY 2025

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Contact Craig Hitchcock at 720.266.6231 or craig@5280.com for more information.

Dining Guide

PRICE KEY
Average Entrée

$	under $15
$$	$16 to $20
$$$	$21 to $30
$$$$	$31 and higher

SYMBOL KEY

●
Indicates a restaurant featured in *5280* for the first time (though not necessarily a restaurant that has just opened).

★
Indicates inclusion in *5280*'s 2024 list of Denver's best restaurants. These selections are at the discretion of *5280* editors and are subject to change.

ACE EAT SERVE $$$
Uptown / Asian This Uptown restaurant and ping-pong hall features Asian-inspired cuisine and 10 ping-pong tables. Try the Sichuan shrimp wontons. Reservations accepted. *501 E. 17th Ave., 303-800-7705. Dinner, Brunch*

AFRICAN GRILL & BAR $$
Lakewood / African Explore a bevy of dishes from across Africa at this warm and inviting restaurant run by the Osei-Fordwuo family. Peanut soups, samosas, and jollof rice are just some of the crave-worthy options available here. Reservations accepted. *955 S. Kipling Parkway, Lakewood, 303-985-4497. Lunch, Dinner*

★**ALMA FONDA FINA** $$$$
LoHi / Mexican This contemporary Mexican restaurant wows with its creative, shareable plates, which often feature homemade masa and flavor-packed salsas. The camote asado (roasted sweet potato) is an excellent way to start off your meal. Reservations accepted. *2556 15th St., 303-455-9463. Dinner*

ANNETTE $$$
Aurora / American James Beard Award–winning chef Caroline Glover's Annette delivers a lineup of seasonal salads, pastas, wood-fired proteins, and other comforting bites in a modern, inviting space. Reservations accepted. *2501 Dallas St., Suite 108, Aurora, 720-710-9975. Dinner*

ARABESQUE $$
Boulder / Mediterranean Sip house-made chai and sample Middle Eastern delights in this charming spot. Reservations not accepted. *1634 Walnut St., Boulder, 720-242-8623. Breakfast, Lunch*

ASH'KARA $$$
LoHi / Middle Eastern Chef Daniel Asher offers a playful take on Middle Eastern cuisine at this plant-bedecked eatery. Order the falafel and a shareable tagine. Reservations accepted. *2005 W. 33rd Ave., 303-537-4407. Dinner, Brunch*

AVANTI FOOD & BEVERAGE $$
LoHi / International Current tenants of this food collective include Gorlami Pizza, Bowls by Ko, Quiero Arepas, Knockabout Burgers, and Pho King Rapidos. *3200 Pecos St., 720-269-4778. Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner*

BACON SOCIAL HOUSE $$
Littleton / Contemporary This fun, casual restaurant's beloved namesake ingredient is at the forefront of many of its dishes. Multiple locations. Reservations accepted. *2100 W. Littleton Blvd., Littleton, 720-750-7107. Breakfast, Lunch, Brunch*

★**BAEKGA** $$$
Lowry Field / Korean Chef-owner Sean Baek serves flavorful Korean eats at this quaint Lowry Town Center spot. Don't miss out on the lunch specials: hearty portions of protein and rice that come with plenty of banchan (side dishes). Reservations not accepted. *100 Quebec St., Suite 115, 720-639-3872. Lunch, Dinner*

BÁNH & BUTTER BAKERY CAFE $
Aurora / French Thoa Nguyen crafts French pastries inspired by her Vietnamese heritage at this East Colfax cafe. Go for the dazzling crêpe cakes, each made with 25 to 30 layers. Reservations not accepted. *9935 E. Colfax Ave., Aurora, 720-513-9313. Breakfast, Lunch*

BECKON $$$$
RiNo / Contemporary Chef Duncan Holmes brings an elevated, intimate dining experience to Larimer Street. The seasonal menu changes frequently, and excellent, thoughtful wine pairings are available. Reservations accepted. *2843 Larimer St., 303-749-0020. Dinner*

BLACKBELLY $$$
Boulder / American Chef Hosea Rosenberg's carnivore-friendly menu focuses on charcuterie, small plates, and daily butcher specials. Try the koji-cured heritage pork chop. Also check out the adjacent butcher shop and market, which serves breakfast and lunch. Reservations accepted. *1606 Conestoga St., Boulder, 303-247-1000. Dinner*

BLUE PAN PIZZA $$
West Highland / Pizza Masterfully crafted Detroit-style pizza is the draw at this tiny spot. Try the Brooklyn Bridge, topped with pepperoni, Italian sausage, and ricotta and Romano cheeses. Also try the Congress Park location. Reservations not accepted. *3930 W. 32nd Ave., 720-456-7666. Lunch, Dinner*

BRASSERIE BRIXTON $$$$
Cole / French Pair the likes of steak frites, pâté with house-baked sourdough, and other comforting French specialties with a glass of wine at this neighborhood bistro. Reservations accepted. *3701 N. Williams St., 720-617-7911. Dinner*

CAFE BRAZIL $$$
Berkeley / Latin American This colorful South American restaurant specializes in seafood and shellfish and is great for those with dietary restrictions. Reservations accepted. *4408 Lowell Blvd., 303-480-1877. Dinner*

★**CARNE** $$$$
RiNo / Steak House The newest restaurant from chef Dana Rodriguez, this "steak home" grills exquisite cuts of beef at a range of price points. Also explore its internationally inspired menu of shared plates and composed entrées. Reservations accepted. *2601 Larimer St., 303-953-1558. Dinner*

CARRERA'S TACOS $
Greenwood Village / Mexican Brothers Josh and Ryan Carrera sling West Coast–style tacos at this food truck turned brick-and-mortar. Try the Cali burrito, stuffed with french fries and your choice of protein. Reservations not accepted. *7939 E. Arapahoe Road, Greenwood Village, 720-689-8035. Lunch, Dinner*

CHOLON $$$
LoDo / Asian This upscale restaurant serves modern twists on Pan-Asian cuisine. Don't miss the French onion soup dumplings. Also try the location near Sloan's Lake. Reservations accepted. *1555 Blake St., 303-353-5223. Lunch, Dinner*

CHOOK $$
Platt Park / Australian Chook specializes in Australian-style, charcoal-grilled rotisserie chicken and fresh veggie sides, like celery-apple slaw and smashed cucumbers. Multiple locations. Reservations not accepted. *1300 S. Pearl St., 303-282-8399. Lunch, Dinner*

CONVIVIO CAFÉ $
Berkeley / Cafe This cafe is named after the Guatemalan convivio, a get-together where all are welcome. Sip on spiced lattes and indulge in pastries and light lunch fare, such as alfajores (dulce de leche cookies) and tostadas. Reservations not accepted. *4935 W. 38th Ave. Breakfast, Lunch*

DAUGHTER THAI KITCHEN & BAR $$$
LoHi / Thai This date-night-ready Thai restaurant from Ounjit Hardacre serves beautifully plated dishes and inventive cocktails with an elegant ambience to match. Reservations accepted. *1700 Platte St., Suite 140, 720-667-4652. Lunch, Dinner*

★**DÂN DÃ** $$
Aurora / Vietnamese Time-tested family recipes delight at An and Thao Nguyen's Vietnamese eatery dedicated to comfort food. Don't miss the dazzling spring roll towers and bubbling clay pots. Reservations accepted. *9945 E. Colfax Ave., Aurora, 720-476-7183. Lunch, Dinner*

DEL FRISCO'S GRILLE $$$$
Cherry Creek / Contemporary A more casual iteration of the beloved steak house, this venue serves up classic dishes with modern twists and local ingredients. Don't miss the cheese steak egg rolls. Reservations accepted. *100 St. Paul St., Suite 140, 303-320-8529. Lunch, Dinner, Brunch*

WANT MORE DINING OPTIONS? Visit our online listings at 5280.com/restaurants.

5280 SCENE CALENDAR

PROMOTIONS | EVENTS | SPONSORSHIPS

NATIONAL WESTERN
CommonSpirit

JAN
11-26

National Western Stock Show

NW Complex, 4655 Humboldt St, Denver

Get ready for the ride of a lifetime! For 16 unforgettable days in January, the National Western Stock Show turns Denver into the ultimate Western destination with thrilling rodeos, champion livestock, exciting horse shows, and fun-filled family events. Don't miss out!

Information and tickets at nationalwestern.com.

JAN
13

Submit Your Nominations for *5280* Top Doctors

If you have a colleague who you'd like to see included in the **2025 Top Doctors issue of *5280* magazine**, now's your chance to make that happen! Starting January 13, submit your nominations for this year's Top Doctors—nominations are due by February 14.

Nominate now at 5280scene.com/5280-top-doctors-nominations.

Boulder
11TH ANNUAL
BOULDER
INTERNATIONAL
FILM FESTIVAL
MARCH 5TH

MAR
13-16

Boulder International Film Festival

The 21st Annual Boulder International Film Festival will bring films and filmmakers to Boulder and Longmont for a four-day celebration of the art of cinema. BIFF showcases the best films by new and emerging filmmakers, as well as some of our industry's most talented directors, producers, and actors. Passes and Gift / Ticket Packs on sale NOW!

Information and tickets at biff1.com.

MAR
29

The *5280* Brunch Event

Asterisk | 10:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m.

Mark your calendar! *5280*'s annual bash celebrating the best of Denver area BRUNCH is back this March. Sign up to The Scene List and be the first to know when tickets go on sale. There is even a special discount in it for you!

Information and tickets at 5280scene.com/5280-brunch-event.

5280SCENE | SCAN HERE TO VIEW ONLINE

DENVER MILK MARKET $$
LoDo / International Sage Hospitality's 11-venue collection of bars and restaurants features everything from fresh pasta to poke bowls to lobster rolls. *1800 Wazee St., 303-792-8242. Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner, Brunch*

DIMESTORE DELIBAR $$
LoHi / American This restaurant, bar, convenience store, and market serves elevated deli fare in an eclectic setting. Try the rolled focaccia sandwiches. Reservations accepted. *1575 Boulder St., Suite A, 303-537-5323. Lunch, Dinner*

★**DOUGH COUNTER** $$
University Hills / Pizza This fast-casual pizzeria specializes in Sicilian- and New York–style pies. For the former, we especially like the Triple Threat, which is striped with marinara, pesto, and vodka sauces. The house-made chicken tenders are also delightful. Reservations not accepted. *2466 S. Colorado Blvd., 303-997-8977. Lunch, Dinner*

DRAGONFLY NOODLE $$
LoDo / Asian This eatery from restaurateur Edwin Zoe serves a multinational variety of bao and noodle dishes. Order any of the bowls of ramen with house-made noodles. Also try the Boulder location. Reservations not accepted. *1350 16th Street Mall, 720-543-8000. Lunch, Dinner*

EDGEWATER PUBLIC MARKET $$
Edgewater / International Satisfy your cravings for everything from wild game sandwiches to Ethiopian fare at this collective of nearly two dozen food stalls and boutiques. *5505 W. 20th Ave., Edgewater, 720-749-2239. Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner*

EFRAIN'S OF BOULDER $
Boulder / Mexican This classic institution in Boulder is known for its lively atmosphere, low prices, and massive bowls of pork green chile. Reservations not accepted. *2480 Canyon Blvd., Boulder, 303-440-4045. Lunch, Dinner*

EL FIVE $$$
LoHi / Mediterranean Justin Cucci's fifth Edible Beats concept boasts panoramic views, a menu of creative tapas, and Spanish-style gin and tonics. Reservations accepted. *2930 Umatilla St., 303-524-9193. Dinner*

EL TACO DE MEXICO $
Lincoln Park / Mexican This Denver favorite, which won an America's Classics Award from the James Beard Foundation in 2020, serves Mexican food with an emphasis on authenticity. Try the chile relleno burrito. Reservations not accepted. *714 Santa Fe Drive, 303-623-3926. Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner*

ELWAY'S $$$$
Downtown / Steak House This sleek restaurant named after the Broncos great serves classic steak house fare in upscale environs. Reservations accepted. *1881 Curtis St., 303-312-3107. Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner, Brunch*

FARM & MARKET $
RiNo / Health This 3,000-square-foot hydroponic farm sells its grown-in-water greens and also transforms them into grab-and-go salads and soups. Reservations not accepted. *2401 Larimer St., 303-927-6652. Lunch, Dinner*

FARMHOUSE THAI EATERY $$
Lakewood / Thai This cozy spot offers flavorful specialties from multiple regions, including papaya pok pok and khao kha moo. Reservations not accepted. *98 Wadsworth Blvd., Suite 117, Lakewood, 303-237-2475. Lunch, Dinner*

FISH N BEER $$$
RiNo / Seafood Kevin Morrison offers approachable, fresh seafood and a hearty beer list at this casual oysterette. Try the ceviche or wood-fired whole bass. Reservations accepted. *3510 Larimer St., 303-248-3497. Dinner*

FLAGSTAFF HOUSE $$$$
Boulder / Contemporary Located on the side of Flagstaff Mountain, this eatery has a huge wine list and a spectacular view of Boulder. Try the foie gras. Reservations accepted. *1138 Flagstaff Road, Boulder, 303-442-4640. Dinner*

FRANK & ROZE $
Hale / Cafe This stylish cafe serves sustainably sourced coffee from South America, Africa, Asia, and beyond. Try the breakfast sandwiches. Reservations not accepted. *4097 E. Ninth Ave., 720-328-2960. Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner*

★**FRASCA FOOD AND WINE** $$$$
Boulder / Italian The elegant fare at Frasca, an ode to the cuisine of Friuli–Venezia Giulia in Italy from master sommelier Bobby Stuckey and chef Lachlan Mackinnon-Patterson, always wows. Splurge on executive chef Ian Palazzola's nine-course Friulano menu. Reservations accepted. *1738 Pearl St., Boulder, 303-442-6966. Dinner*

G-QUE BBQ $$
Westminster / Barbecue This fast-casual joint serves award-winning hickory-smoked pork, brisket, ribs, and more. Multiple locations. Reservations not accepted. *5160 W. 120th Ave., Suite K, Westminster, 303-379-9205. Lunch, Dinner*

THE GREENWICH $$$
RiNo / Pizza Restaurateur Delores Tronco brings a slice of her favorite New York City neighborhood to RiNo. Reservations accepted. *3258 Larimer St., 720-868-5006. Dinner*

GUARD AND GRACE $$$$
Downtown / Steak House Chef Troy Guard's modern steak house offers a chic setting for its elevated fare. Reservations accepted. *1801 California St., 303-293-8500. Lunch, Dinner*

HEY KIDDO $$$$
Berkeley / Contemporary From the team behind the Wolf's Tailor and Brutø, this eclectic, globally inspired restaurant presents fine dining fare in relaxed environs. Reservations accepted. *4337 Tennyson St., Suite 300, 720-778-2977. Dinner*

★**HOP ALLEY** $$$$
RiNo / Chinese From Tommy Lee of Uncle, this neighborhood hangout's daily menu is composed of dishes rooted in Chinese tradition with a distinctive flair. Don't miss the exclusive chef's counter experience. Reservations accepted. *3500 Larimer St., 720-379-8340. Dinner*

INDIA'S RESTAURANT $$
Hampden / Indian This spot serves traditional fare, including flavorful dishes like tandoori chicken. Take advantage of the lunch buffet. Reservations accepted. *8921 E. Hampden Ave., 303-755-4284. Lunch, Dinner*

ISTANBUL CAFE & BAKERY $
Washington Virginia Vale / Middle Eastern Friendly owner Ismet Yilmaz prepares authentic Turkish pastries. Multiple locations. Reservations not accepted. *850 S. Monaco Parkway, Suite 9, 720-787-7751. Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner*

IZAKAYA DEN $$$
Platt Park / Japanese Ultra-fresh sushi, sashimi, and creative small plates are on the menu at this local favorite. Reservations accepted. *1487-A S. Pearl St., 303-777-0691. Lunch, Dinner*

JAX FISH HOUSE & OYSTER BAR $$$
LoDo / Seafood Enjoy sustainable seafood in an upbeat atmosphere. Specialties include the raw oyster bar and seasonally composed plates. Multiple locations. Reservations accepted. *1539 17th St., 303-292-5767. Dinner*

KAWA NI $$$$
LoHi / Asian Connecticut transplant Bill Taibe helms this upscale izakaya concept in LoHi. Peruse the eclectic menu of noodles, sushi, and small plates, and don't miss the shaved broccoli miso goma. Reservations accepted. *1900 W. 32nd Ave., 303-455-9208. Dinner*

★**KIKÉ'S RED TACOS** $
LoHi / Mexican This brick-and-mortar location of the popular Mexican food truck is known for its queso tacos, which come stuffed with cheese and your choice of meat. Doctor up your order with the rainbow of sauces at the salsa bar. Reservations not accepted. *1200 W. 38th Ave., 720-397-0591. Lunch, Dinner*

KUMOYA JAPANESE KITCHEN $$$
Highland / Asian Seasoned sushi maker and chef Corey Baker serves rare-in-Denver nigiri and dry-aged fish in a cozy, romantic setting. Don't miss the sandoitchi: a milk bread sandwich with chicken thigh katsu and Japanese curry egg salad. Reservations accepted. *2400 W. 32nd Ave., 303-862-6664. Dinner*

★**LA FORÊT** $$$$
Speer / French Transport yourself to the forest at this cocktail-centric French restaurant decorated with floor-to-ceiling aspen trunks. Head in during pastis hour to sample the anise-flavored apéritif with small plates, or dine on dishes like stag au poivre or rabbit vadouvan. Reservations not accepted. *38 S. Broadway, 303-351-7938. Dinner*

LEEZAKAYA $$$$
Aurora / Japanese From the team behind Tofu Story and Mono Mono Korean Fried Chicken, this swanky eatery boasts a large menu of Japanese bites and sake. The mentaiko creamy pasta is a must-order. Reservations accepted. *2710 S. Havana St., Aurora, 720-769-6595. Lunch, Dinner*

●**LITTLE ARTHUR'S** $$$
Capitol Hill / American Located inside Out of the Barrel Taproom, Little Arthur's uses high-quality ingredients to craft viral East Coast specialties such as a $40 margherita pizza and a $24 cheesesteak. Reservations not accepted. *205 E. Seventh Ave. Dinner*

LOU'S ITALIAN SPECIALTIES $$
Curtis Park / Italian This takeout-only spot by Josh Pollack of Rosenberg's Bagels & Delicatessen takes after classic Tri State Italian delis. Try the Louie, a classic sub packed with salami, capicola, and ham sliced to order. Reservations not accepted. *3357 N. Downing St., 720-287-3642. Lunch, Dinner*

★**LUCINA EATERY & BAR** $$$
South Park Hill / Latin American Bold flavors from Latin America, the Caribbean, and coastal Spain tantalize at this lively restaurant. Try the mofongo (plantain mash) or the two-person paella with rotating toppings, only served on Fridays and Saturdays. Reservations accepted. *2245 Kearney St., Suite 101, 720-814-1053. Dinner*

MACHETE TEQUILA & TACOS $
Cherry Creek / Mexican Enjoy tequilas and tacos al pastor at this Cherry Creek eatery. Also try the Union Station location. Reservations accepted. *2817 E. Third Ave., 303-333-1567. Lunch, Dinner*

★**MAJOR TOM** $$$$
RiNo / American This lounge from the team behind Beckon offers a Champagne-centric drink menu and a delectable lineup of shareable bites. Enjoy larger-format plates at a table inside, or throw back some oysters on the beautiful patio. Reservations accepted. *2845 Larimer St., 303-848-9777. Dinner*

★**MAKFAM** $$
Baker / Chinese The Chinese food at this street-food-inspired, fast-casual eatery in the Baker neighborhood eschews tradition for a whole lot more fun. Try the jian bing (scallion pancake) sandwiches. Reservations not accepted. *39 W. First Ave. Lunch, Dinner*

★**MARIGOLD** $$$$
Lyons / European This small, light-filled restaurant serves seasonally driven, French- and Italian-influenced fare. The pink-peppercorn-laced farinata (chickpea pancake) is a delicious mainstay of the frequently changing menu, and the amaro-focused cocktail program is also delightful. Reservations accepted. *405 Main St., Suite B, Lyons, 303-823-2333. Dinner*

MIZU IZAKAYA $$
LoHi / Sushi This contemporary Japanese restaurant offers an impressive bar and a hip atmosphere. Order items from the binchotan (charcoal grill) or the raw bar, or give appetizers like the cream pork kimchi a try. Reservations accepted. *1560 Boulder St., 720-372-7100. Lunch, Dinner*

★**MOLOTOV KITSCHEN & COCKTAILS** $$$$
City Park / Eastern European The ever-changing menu at this kitschy restaurant in City Park from chef Bo Porytko celebrates the cuisine of Ukraine. Try creative takes on borscht and Eastern European dumplings. Reservations accepted. *3333 E. Colfax Ave., 303-316-3333. Dinner*

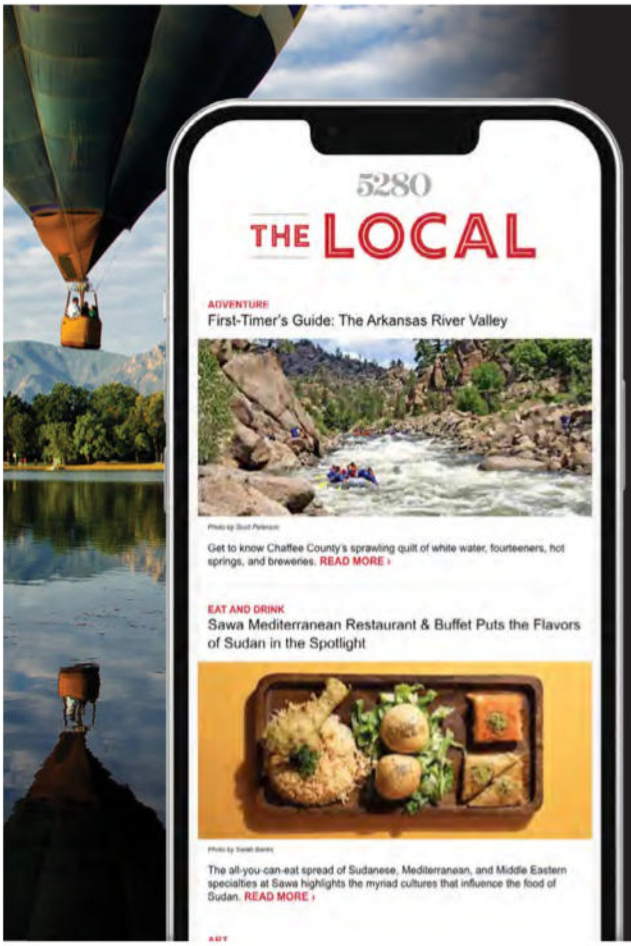
MY BROTHER'S BAR $
LoHi / Pub Enjoy beers and burgers with classical music in one of Denver's oldest bars. Order the JCB burger with jalapeño cream cheese. Reservations not accepted. *2376 15th St., 303-455-9991. Lunch, Dinner*

NI TUYO $$$
Belcaro / Mexican Visit this Bonnie Brae eatery for bubbly molcajetes: piping-hot stone bowls of Mexican meats and veggies stewed in chile sauce. Or grab a seat at the bar for a tasty margarita with an order of chips and salsa. Reservations not accepted. *730 S. University Blvd., 303-282-8896. Dinner*

NOBLE RIOT $$$
RiNo / American Find charcuterie boards, fried chicken, and other bites at this sommelier-operated natural wine bar. Reservations accepted. *1336 27th St., 303-993-5330. Dinner*

★**NOISETTE RESTAURANT & BAKERY** $$$$
LoHi / French Chefs Tim and Lillian Lu serve elegant renditions of bourgeoisie-style specialties (French home-cooked comforts) in a romantic, light-drenched space. Tear into the perfectly crisp baguette to set the Parisian scene for your dining experience. Reservations accepted. *3254 Navajo St., Suite 100, 720-769-8103. Dinner, Brunch*

NOLA VOODOO TAVERN AND PERKS $$
Clayton / Southern New Orleans native and owner Henry Batiste serves his grandmother's



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recipes for gumbo, po' boys, and much more at this Louisiana-inspired spot. Reservations accepted. *3321 Bruce Randolph Ave., 720-389-9544. Lunch, Dinner*

OCEAN PRIME $$$$
LoDo / Seafood A marriage between land and sea, this supper club offers steak house dining and fresh fish in one. Reservations accepted. *1465 Larimer St., 303-825-3663. Dinner*

★**ODIE B'S** $
Sunnyside / American Sandwiches reach their prime at this fast-casual restaurant. Try twists on classics like the fried chicken sandwich with deviled egg spread and the mixed bag of fries, which combines four different shapes of fried spuds. Reservations not accepted. *2651 W. 38th Ave., 303-993-8078. Breakfast, Lunch, Brunch*

OSAKA RAMEN $$
RiNo / Japanese Jeff Osaka's modern ramen shop features original noodle soups, bento boxes, and creative small plates. Reservations not accepted. *2611 Walnut St., 303-955-7938. Lunch, Dinner*

★**OTOTO** $$$
Platt Park / Japanese From the team behind Sushi Den, this eatery breaks away from its Den Corner counterparts by focusing on more casual Japanese eats. Try the yellowtail collar grilled over white oak charcoal. Reservations accepted. *1501 S. Pearl St., 303-942-1416. Dinner, Brunch*

●**PABORITO** $$
Lincoln Park / Filipino Located inside the Vallejo Food Pick-Up restaurant co-op, this takeout-only spot serves the flavorful fare owners Jayson Leaño and Geraldine Gan grew up eating in the Philippines. Try the grilled chicken inasal with atchara (pickled unripe papaya). *810 Vallejo St. Lunch, Dinner*

★**POINT EASY** $$$$
Whittier / Contemporary This stylish, inviting farm-to-table eatery produces feasts made with thoughtfully sourced ingredients, many of which are grown locally. Pair the calamari- and tomato-studded bucatini nero with a specialty cocktail. Reservations accepted. *2000 E. 28th Ave., 303-233-5656. Dinner*

POTAGER $$$
Capitol Hill / Contemporary Since 1997, this rustic Capitol Hill restaurant has specialized in fresh, seasonally driven food. The menu changes once a month. Reservations accepted. *1109 N. Ogden St., 303-246-7073. Dinner*

QUIERO AREPAS $
Platt Park / Latin American The entirely gluten-free menu at this Platt Park eatery offers delicious selections like the pollo guisado arepa, a flatbread that comes stuffed with shredded chicken, black beans, and cheese. Also check out the LoHi location. Reservations not accepted. *1859 S. Pearl St., 720-432-4205. Lunch, Dinner*

RAS KASSA'S $$$
Lafayette / Ethiopian Find shareable Ethiopian cuisine in a comfortable environment. Order a meat or vegetarian combo plate and a glass of honey wine. Reservations not accepted. *802 S. Public Road, Lafayette, 303-447-2919. Dinner*

REDEEMER PIZZA $$$
RiNo / Pizza Spencer White and Alex Figura, the duo behind Dio Mio, bring perfectly blistered, New York City–style sourdough pizza to RiNo. Reservations accepted. *2705 Larimer St., 720-780-1379. Dinner*

★**RESTAURANT OLIVIA** $$$$
Washington Park / Italian This cozy yet modern neighborhood spot specializes in fresh pastas of all varieties. The ravioli and other stuffed pastas are must-orders, and a specialty Negroni doesn't hurt, either. Reservations accepted. *290 S. Downing St., 303-999-0395. Dinner*

RIOJA $$$$
LoDo / Mediterranean James Beard Award–winning chef Jennifer Jasinski creates high-end Mediterranean-influenced cuisine. Also try her lunchtime takeout pop-up, Flavor Dojo, which offers healthy bowls. Reservations accepted. *1431 Larimer St., 303-820-2282. Lunch, Dinner, Brunch*

SAFTA $$$$
RiNo / Mediterranean At Safta, acclaimed chef Alon Shaya and his team serve modern Israeli fare. Crave-worthy specialties include hummus, labneh, and other dips accompanied by wood-oven pita and crispy Persian rice with cherries and sunflower seeds. Also check out the weekend brunch buffet. Reservations accepted. *3330 Brighton Blvd., Suite 201, 720-408-2444. Brunch, Dinner*

★**SAP SUA** $$$
Congress Park / Vietnamese This smart eatery from husband-and-wife duo Ni and Anna Nguyen finds its culinary footing in Vietnamese flavors. Herbaceous offerings like culantro-capped tomato toast and lemongrass-scented pork shoulder are favorites of those who frequent the Congress Park restaurant. Reservations accepted. *2550 E. Colfax Ave., 303-736-2303. Dinner*

★**SPUNTINO** $$$$
Highland / Italian Enjoy the eclectic and locally sourced menu at this Italian-inspired, husband-and-wife-owned spot. Go for any of the dishes with Southern Indian influences—a product of chef Cindhura Reddy's heritage—like malai kofta gnocchi. Don't miss the house-made gelatos for dessert. Reservations accepted. *2639 W. 32nd Ave., 303-433-0949. Dinner*

STONE CELLAR BISTRO $$$
Arvada / Contemporary Visit this farm-to-table spot in Olde Town Arvada for beautifully presented dishes made with local produce by chefs Jordan Alley and Brandon Kerr. Don't miss the foie gras parfait or the hot honey fried chicken. Reservations accepted. *7605 Grandview Ave., Arvada, 720-630-7908. Dinner*

★**SUNDAY VINYL** $$$
LoDo / European This Union Station restaurant offers warm hospitality, exquisite cuisine, and an extensive wine list—all to the soundtrack of a vinyl-only playlist. Order the high-meets-low caviar-topped hash brown patty and something from the indulgent selection of sweet treats. Reservations accepted. *1803 16th Street Mall, 720-738-1803. Dinner*

SUSHI SASA $$$
LoHi / Japanese Enjoy Japanese fusion cuisine—including sushi combos, poke bowls, noodles, and much more—in a sleek, modern setting. Don't miss the seared wagyu beef with cucumbers, foie gras, and sesame tamari. Reservations accepted. *2401 15th St., Suite 80, 303-433-7272. Lunch, Dinner*

TAMAYO $$$
LoDo / Mexican This spot's modern menu is derived from the flavors and ingredients of chef-owner Richard Sandoval's native Mexico. Check out the rooftop lounge and the selection of more than 100 tequilas. Reservations accepted. *1400 Larimer St., 720-946-1433. Lunch, Dinner, Brunch*

TAVERNETTA $$$$
LoDo / Italian The team behind Boulder's acclaimed Frasca Food and Wine offers the same attention to hospitality at this more casual Denver restaurant. The charming space is home to dishes from across Italy and a deep wine list. Reservations accepted. *1889 16th St., 720-605-1889. Lunch, Dinner*

TEALEE'S TEAHOUSE AND BOOKSTORE $$
Five Points / International Head to this charming teahouse-bookstore-market for loose-leaf and specialty teas and all-day fare like soups, salads, sandwiches, and freshly baked pastries. Reservations accepted. *611 22nd St., 303-593-2013. Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner*

TEMAKI DEN $$
RiNo / Japanese Chef Kenta Kamo and Sushi Den's Toshi Kizaki team up to bring delectable temaki (hand rolls), aburi (flame-seared) nigiri, and craft beverages to this restaurant inside the Source Hotel in RiNo. Reservations accepted. *3330 Brighton Blvd., Suite 110, 225-405-0811. Dinner*

★**TRAVELING MERCIES** $$$
Aurora / Seafood Annette's Caroline Glover expands her offerings in Aurora's Stanley Marketplace with this petite yet airy oyster and cocktail bar. Order the anchovy and baguette with French churned butter. Reservations accepted. *2501 Dallas St., Suite 311, Aurora. Dinner*

TUPELO HONEY SOUTHERN KITCHEN & BAR $$$
LoDo / Southern Nosh on reimagined versions of down-home dishes, such as honey-dusted fried chicken. Reservations accepted. *1650 Wewatta St., 720-274-0650. Lunch, Dinner, Brunch*

URBAN VILLAGE GRILL $$$
Lone Tree / Indian This eatery serves classic and contemporary dishes from across India. Reservations accepted. *8505 Park Meadows Center Drive, Suite 2184A, Lone Tree, 720-536-8565. Lunch, Dinner*

US THAI CAFE $
Edgewater / Thai Fresh ingredients, spicy dishes, and a chef straight from Thailand make for an authentic, if mouth-tingling, dining experience. Reservations accepted. *5228 W. 25th Ave., Edgewater, 303-233-3345. Lunch, Dinner*

VINH XUONG BAKERY $$
Athmar Park / Vietnamese This family-owned bakery has roots in Denver that stretch

back more than 25 years. They serve up delicious banh mi sandwiches and other tasty Vietnamese treats. Reservations not accepted. *2370 Alameda Ave., 303-922-0999. Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner*

WATERCOURSE FOODS $$
Uptown / American This vegetarian icon has been serving wholesome food since 1998. The zesty soups, salads, and wraps are healthy and delicious. Reservations accepted. *837 E. 17th Ave., 303-832-7313. Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner, Brunch*

WEATHERVANE CAFE $
City Park West / American Enjoy a small but sumptuous menu of breakfast items, sandwiches, and salads at this cozy Uptown cafe. Reservations not accepted. *1725 E. 17th Ave. Breakfast, Lunch*

WELLNESS SUSHI $$
Congress Park / Japanese Vegan sushi stars at this fast-casual joint by husband-and-wife duo Steven and Phoebe Lee. Don't miss hot options like the soupless ramen. Reservations not accepted. *2504 E. Colfax Ave., 720-306-4989. Lunch, Dinner*

WHITTIER CAFE $
Whittier / Cafe This espresso bar, which supports social-justice-related causes, serves coffee, beer, and wine sourced from various African nations and a small menu of pastries, breakfast burritos, panini, and more. Reservations not accepted. *1710 E. 25th Ave., 720-550-7440. Breakfast, Lunch*

★**THE WOLF'S TAILOR** $$$$
Sunnyside / Contemporary This Michelin-starred restaurant from chef-restaurateur Kelly Whitaker transforms local ingredients into a globally minded, prix fixe tasting menu. Don't get too full before pastry chef Emily Thompson's dessert course. Reservations accepted. *4058 Tejon St., 720-456-6705. Dinner*

WYNKOOP BREWING COMPANY $$
LoDo / Pub Enjoy fresh beer and pub favorites such as the bison burger at one of Denver's original brewpubs. Reservations accepted. *1634 18th St., 303-297-2700. Lunch, Dinner, Brunch*

XICAMITI LA TAQUERÍA $$
Golden / Mexican This long-standing joint serves cooked-to-order burritos, tacos, quesadillas, and alambres (skillet dishes). Reservations not accepted. *715 Washington Ave., Golden, 303-215-3436. Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner*

YACHT CLUB $
Cole / American Enjoy classic and creative cocktails at this loungelike bar alongside an array of snacks. Reservations not accepted. *3701 N. Williams St., 720-443-1135. Dinner*

YAHYA'S MEDITERRANEAN GRILL & PASTRIES $$
City Park West / Mediterranean This family-run restaurant serves silky hummus, grilled kebabs, and from-scratch sweets. Reservations accepted. *2207 E. Colfax Ave., 720-532-8746. Lunch, Dinner*

★**YUAN WONTON** $$
North Park Hill / Asian House-made dumplings earn top billing at this ambitious eatery from chef Penelope Wong. Head in on Fridays for a dim-sum-themed lunch that showcases the best of Wong's hand-folded delicacies. Reservations accepted. *2878 Fairfax St., 303-320-5642. Lunch*

ZEPPELIN STATION $$
RiNo / International This industrial-chic food hall in RiNo is home to seven globally inspired food and drink vendors, including Procession Coffee, Purisma, and Gyros King. *3501 Wazee St. Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner, Brunch*

ZOCALITO LATIN BISTRO $$$
Downtown / Mexican Formerly located in Aspen, chef/owner Michael Beary's upscale Oaxacan eatery found a home in the heart of Denver. Try the pork tenderloin. Reservations accepted. *999 18th St., Suite 107, 720-923-5965. Dinner*

ZOE MA MA $
LoDo / Chinese This cozy counter-service spot offers Chinese home-style cooking. Also try the Boulder location. Reservations not accepted. *1625 Wynkoop St., 303-545-6262. Lunch, Dinner*

▸ These listings are in no way related to advertising in *5280*. If you find that a restaurant differs significantly from the information in its listing or your favorite restaurant is missing from the Dining Guide, please let us know. Write us at 5280 Elevated, Inc., 1675 Larimer St., Suite 675, Denver, CO 80202 or dining@5280.com.

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CONTINUED FROM PAGE 51

This past fall, seven Venezuelans sat under a tree near the intersection of East Alameda Avenue and South Colorado Boulevard. Ranging in age from 20 to 30, they were fathers and laborers; one said that he was a former professional baseball player. When asked about DASP, one said that you had to "have connections" to access the program. So, instead, they were washing car windows on this corner, each making about $50 per day in a city where rent for a one-bedroom apartment averages almost $1,700 a month.

ON A BLUEBIRD day in October, an army of red MAGA hats assembled in north Aurora, where Trump held a sold-out rally at the Gaylord Rockies Resort & Convention Center's sprawling property near Denver International Airport. Ten thousand people gathered inside the Gaylord's exhibition hall, and thousands more watched a livestream of the event on a screen outside the hotel, pumping their fists to the Lee Greenwood anthem "God Bless the U.S.A." Rooftop snipers and drones surveilled the crowd, who roared and chanted Trump's name when he walked onstage.

After greeting the crowd, Trump began his nearly 90-minute-long stump speech. "[Kamala Harris] has imported an army of illegal gang members and migrant criminals from the dungeons of the Third World... prisons, jails, insane asylums, mental institutions. She has had them resettled beautifully into your community to prey upon innocent American citizens," he said from behind a lectern flanked by two poster-size mug shots of members of Tren de Aragua, the Venezuelan gang Trump claimed had taken over Aurora during September's presidential debate. "And no place is it more evident than right here."

Rumors that Venezuelan gangs were terrorizing Aurora began widely circulating this past summer, when a video showing several armed men entering an apartment in a northwest Aurora complex started making the rounds in the news and on social media. Trump leaned on the episode throughout the fall. After the debate, Aurora exploded into the national consciousness as the poster child of Biden's failed immigration policies.

In advance of Trump's visit, Aurora Mayor Mike Coffman issued a denial, stating that "the concerns about Venezuelan gang activity have been grossly exaggerated." While Venezuelan gangs *are* active in Aurora, they aren't any more of an issue than American gangs, says Marc Sears, a sergeant with the Aurora Police Department. And, when it comes to crime in general, studies show that undocumented immigrants commit crimes at a lower rate than native-born citizens or documented immigrants. However, Coffman's denial didn't sit right with Danielle Jurinsky. The Republican, who serves on the Aurora City Council, had seen—and subsequently released on X—an email in which an Aurora police officer claimed a U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agent had told him that Tren de Aragua had "decided to make Denver its headquarters due to sanctuary policies and location."

Jurinsky has been extremely critical of Denver's response to the immigration crisis. "This mass influx of tens of thousands of migrants all at once—I don't know how we possibly absorb that into society and say that it benefits Colorado," she says. "We are going to have to pay millions." She's not wrong about the money. According to the Colorado Department of Education, 8,000 migrant children enrolled in the state's public schools between October 2023 and February 2024, at a cost of $24 million to taxpayers. To fund its emergency response, Denver had to enact budget cuts of $45 million, $8.4 million of which came from the police department and $2.5 million of which came from the fire department. "In my opinion," Jurinsky says, "Americans are being put last."

> **"THIS MASS INFLUX OF TENS OF THOUSANDS OF MIGRANTS ALL AT ONCE—I DON'T KNOW HOW WE POSSIBLY** *absorb that into society* **AND SAY THAT IT BENEFITS COLORADO. WE ARE GOING TO HAVE TO PAY MILLIONS."**

Jurinsky isn't the only one upset. Officials in Castle Rock and Parker have threatened to sue Denver. "This isn't just a decision that Denver gets to make, because it's impacting the rest of the Front Range," Max Brooks, a conservative Castle Rock town councilman, told CBS Colorado. Six counties, including Douglas, Mesa, and Garfield, are suing Governor Jared Polis and Colorado over migrant-friendly state laws, such as a 2019 statute that bans detainment and arrest based on an individual's immigration status.

In the early days following Trump's electoral victory, he promised to make good on his key campaign promise to carry out "the largest mass deportation in the history of our country," a presidential order he's dubbed "Operation Aurora." To do so, he plans to declare a national emergency and invoke the National Insurrection Act, allowing him to deploy the military to aid the effort. Trump has also vowed to go after sanctuary cities, such as Denver, first. The cost of a one-time mass deportation of the nearly 12 million immigrants living in the country illegally? A staggering $315 billion, according to the American Immigration Council.

To meet Trump's aggressive quota of deportations, DU's Galemba suspects the government will go after not just criminals but also "newcomers who entered on various parole programs or those who received other forms of temporary status, permission, or protection under the Biden administration." That means Denver may see an increase in ICE activity and workplace raids. Thousands of immigrants may be deported, which, Galemba says, will have "broader social, human, and economic consequences," such as costlier goods, a dearth of workers, and families being ripped apart. Johnston maintains that solving the immigration crisis will require more than draconian roundups and will instead necessitate a combination of sweeping policy reform and beefed up border security.

Colorado Attorney General Phil Weiser is already preparing legal challenges to the president's plans. Meanwhile, the mayor's office says it will resist Trump's deportation efforts and is looking into enhancing protections for immigrants. The Denver Police Department won't participate in immigration enforcement initiatives; in fact, the mayor at one point said he might deploy the police to stymie federal forces (though he later backtracked). Johnston's comments drew the ire of Trump's new border czar, Tom Homan, who threatened to throw Johnston in jail if he contested the new administration's immigration tactics and has vowed to defund sanctuary cities that don't comply with them. Despite the threats, Johnston says he remains firmly committed to Denver's migrants. "We will always remain a welcoming city that supports our neighbors," Johnston says, "whether you were born and raised here or recently arrived."

IN JULY, a few days before Venezuela’s 2024 presidential election, I again met up with Lili. She had recently filed her asylum paperwork and was awaiting her work authorization, which she expects this month. Over the previous seven months, she had begun cooking and selling arepas and once made $500 in a day, a sum that would have taken her at least six months to earn in Venezuela. Her husband took odd jobs working construction, shoveling snow, and sorting donations at a church. Within two months of arriving in Denver, they’d saved $1,500 and purchased a 1990 Honda Accord. By July, they’d banked $4,000, which they used to buy a modest three-bedroom home in Venezuela, in hopes of returning to it someday. When I asked her if the American dream was a myth or something obtainable, her eyes welled up for the first time in our seven months of conversations. “I can tell my children now that we have our own roof,” she said.

It’s unclear when they will be able to see it. Lili was hopeful that Maduro would be ousted in the July 28 contest, enabling her to go back to Venezuela. But despite overwhelming evidence that the opposition had prevailed, Venezuela’s election authorities announced Maduro as the winner. Lili cried when she heard the news. Violence immediately erupted in the streets, and law enforcement arrested thousands of dissidents—and killed more than 20. A survey from the Venezuelan polling company Meganalisis estimated that 43 percent of Venezuelans are thinking about fleeing the country. Most are not likely to find sanctuary in the United States.

This past June, Biden issued an executive order that made it more difficult for unauthorized migrants to enter the United States. Border encounters plummeted by 77 percent in August 2024, according to the Pew Research Center, eliminating the need for Abbott to bus immigrants outside the state. The last charter from Texas to Denver arrived in June. By late summer, no migrants lived in Denver shelters.

The city estimates that approximately 20,000 of the 42,000 migrants who arrived in Denver between December 2022 and December 2024 are still here. As of late October, more than 3,400 people had gone through work authorization clinics and more than 800 people had participated in DASP; many of these immigrants can now legally work anywhere in the United States, the city’s Ewing says. But because the first cohort didn’t complete the program until the end of November, it’s too soon to gauge DASP’s ultimate success or know how many graduates will find jobs.

By November 1, Denver had spent more than $78 million on migrants—significantly less than the $180 million forecasted at the beginning of 2024, largely because of the mayor ending long-term aid. The city has earmarked $12.5 million for immigrant services in 2025, but DASP is not part of that number: Johnston ended the program in December, though its job-training arm and the legal clinics will likely continue, Ewing says.

Johnston says he believes that Denver emerged as a leader on immigration over the course of the crisis. In September, he delivered a keynote speech at the 21st Annual Immigration Law and Policy Conference in Washington, D.C. “We’ve figured out solutions that no one else has figured out,” Johnston says. “I think a lot of the rest of the country looks to Denver now as a model, which we’re very proud of.” In response to queries Denver received from other municipal leaders, such as those in Kansas City, Johnston’s office this past spring released the Newcomers Playbook, a how-to guide for welcoming migrants.

Yet, immigrant rights groups aren’t as eager as Johnston to praise Denver’s performance. Rather than invent revolutionary programs to handle the influx of immigrants, AFSC’s Piper says, the city simply stopped offering services to migrants, bused them elsewhere, and flat out told them not to come—all of which stemmed the flow. Beneath the city’s spin, Piper says, the reality is that thousands of migrants in Denver still need help. “The main thing I take issue with is the impression that [DASP] is serving hundreds of people, and the impression that we’re continuing to welcome people,” Piper says. “We’re not.” She wishes Johnston would be more transparent: “In order for other cities to learn from us and us from them, we have to be honest about the choices we’re making,” she says.

Denver’s experiment also produced mixed results for Lili, who celebrated her 34th birthday in September. A year before, she had emerged from the Darién Gap full of hope and relief, but life in Denver had not worked out. Lili and her husband couldn’t find consistent work here, and Lili had a sister in Texas who landed her a job. In August, they set off for a suburb outside of Dallas, where Lili started working under the table at a fulfillment center while waiting for her asylum case to be heard in March. She says she misses Denver. “There are many good people there,” Lili wrote to me on WhatsApp. Leaving Colorado, she says, “has hit us hard,” and she plans to move back in with Amanda very soon. With her signature optimism, Lili was determined to press ahead: “It’s time to move forward.” ▲

Kelley Manley is a Denver-based freelance writer. Send feedback to letters@5280.com.

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THE OVERSIMPLIFIED GUIDE TO:

RTD Etiquette

For the first time in four years, RTD is expanding its light rail and bus services across the metro area. We asked Christy Porter—whose Greenwood Village–based Cotillion Academy has taught manners to more than 10,000 children and adults since 1999—how to be an A+ rider. —ROBERT SANCHEZ

1

It doesn't take an astrophysics degree to ride RTD, but a basic understanding of the **golden rule** is useful. Would you want to sit next to someone who's groaning about train delays? "Create a space of respect for everyone," Porter says. "Hopefully, others feed off that."

2

But don't get carried away: Being overly polite might actually be *impolite*. Stepping aside for someone because you think it's the friendly thing to do could hold up the rest of the queue. "Keep the line together, and get on or off when it's your turn," Porter says. **"Don't overthink it."**

3

Ask before you assist. If you see a rider struggling to get their wheelchair on or off the bus or to lift their 60-pound, $2,000 e-bike onto the train's rack, politely ask if they want a hand. But if the answer is no, back off.

4

In a packed vehicle? Look up from your phone often enough to see who boards after you and **give up priority seats** to seniors and those with physical impairments. Bonus karma points for offering space to anyone carrying a child, groceries, or a heavy growler of craft beer.

5

Choose your snacks wisely. If you need some sustenance, it's OK to eat—but grab a granola bar rather than slurping down a bowl of green chile or busting out a tuna salad sandwich. As Porter says: "No one wants to smell your bologna."

ILLUSTRATION BY SIMONE MASSONI

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